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MANAGEMENT  
COUNCIL

## **DRAFT Report of the Hawaii Archipelago FEP Advisory Panel Meeting**

Tuesday August 29, 2023

9 a.m. – 4 p.m. (HST)

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

Gil Kualii, Hawaii Advisory Panel (AP) vice Chair, opened the meeting at 9:10 a.m. Hawaii AP members included: Nathan Abe, Khang Dang, Abraham Apilona, Len Nakano, and Carrie Johnston. Excused members included: Clay Tam, Amanda Padilla, Nathan Tsao.

Also in attendance was Kitty Simonds (Council Executive Director); Joshua DeMello and Asuka Ishizaki (Council staff); Savannah Lewis (PIRO); Adam Ayers (PIFSC); David Sakoda (HDAR); Alex Min (PIFG).

Public members in attendance included: Roy Morioka, Tammy Harp

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

Council staff provided a report of the last AP meeting and a status of the AP's recommendations. He noted that many of the recommendations were taken up by the Council and that some of the recommendations will require additional participation by the AP in the near future. Two potential projects for the AP to consider working on included developing a working group for infrastructure with the state and working with NMFS PIFSC to develop a Kona crab fishery report card.

An AP member asked about Pohoiki and whether the state can get it working after the past eruption blocking the harbor entrance. He noted that the lack of a boat ramp in that area is a significant economic loss for the island. The vice Chair added that Pohoiki is a big concern for the Hilo fishermen, especially the ika fishermen, but noted that the project is likely dead in the water given that the budget is estimated at \$60M just to dredge. He said given the extent of the lava flow that covered the area, it will be difficult to find a contractor to do the project. He also noted the lack of boat ramp in the area is also a safety concern as rescue boats would also have to launch from farther away.

*The Hawaii AP agreed to include the infrastructure work group and Kona crab fishery report card as work items for their AP plan.*

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

Council staff provided an update on the 2023-2026 AP Plan. The AP has worked to prioritize projects such as small-boat fishery data collection, smart FADs, and mapping traditional fishing grounds (FishMaps). Outreach and education on the Council and its process is also a priority. Council staff suggested revising the AP plan to include specific goals and objectives for a handful of priority projects and developing working groups to work on individual tasks to move the project forward.

The vice Chair said that the AP started by tackling the low hanging fruit, including documenting the fishing areas to address potential marine spatial management issues such as offshore energy. The AP's second activity, the development of SmartFADs, provided good discussions but it needs to be worked on to develop a plan and secure funding.

An AP member suggested adding hosting inter-agency meetings or forums to the AP plans to help move projects forward. She also said that in order to find funding for the SmartFAD, the AP should consider including sensors that monitor for climate change variables as well.

Another AP member agreed with the idea for inter-agency meetings, noting that it would be good for the AP to find out if their ideas can even be done, so it will save the AP time and effort.

*The AP agreed to add hosting inter-agency meetings as activities to move the AP Plan forward and to include monitoring for climate variables as part of the SmartFAD project.*

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

##### **A. Second Quarter Hawaii Fishermen Observations**

AP members provided the following observations for the third quarter for 2023:

- On Kauai, there were two more buoys deployed on the west side and they are starting to produce fish. Tuna fishing has been relatively consistent with a strong yellowfin tuna bite and aku being very good with sizes ranging from two to 30 lbs. A lot of the aku are hanging out at the buoys and in open schools. Summer has been slow for ono but charter companies have been busy. The AP member said that despite all of that, it doesn't matter how good the fish bites, the harbors are never full as it was before and the response to the fish biting is not the same.
- An AP member suggested that no one is going out fishing because all the action is in Hilo. He said that there were 2 prominent schools of aku on the north and south side of Hilo with large fish over 30 lbs. He also said that ethanol-free fuel is 21 cents higher than the same time last year so that might be causing participation decreases elsewhere. He reported on two tournaments with an additional tournament to be held on Labor Day weekend.
- In Kona, fishing has been slow but there has been small to decent size aku. You don't see the trailers that used to be at the boat ramps and harbors and it is only full when there are tournaments. The AP member noted that it could be fuel costs that have caused less participation. He added that there was a recent tournament with 40 boats and the largest aku was 6.5 lbs, the largest ahi was 17 lbs, and the largest marlin was 680 lbs. Another member noted that a 100+ lb. ahi was caught but it was after the stop fishing call.
- On the eastside of Oahu, there haven't been as many trailers and boats going out. The AP member wondered if it was economics, as the costs outweigh the money they would make. She said that people have not been going out in droves like earlier and there hasn't been many large catches either. Fish catches have been smaller than the spring and early summer and those that do go out catch but just smaller and fewer. This might be adding to the low fishing participation.
- The Hawaii longline fishery has had its ups and downs this past summer. Bigeye tuna (ahi) has been harder to catch but albacore tuna (tombo) is up. Captains have reported that it is more profitable to catch lots of tombo than to go fishing for ahi and not catch anything. The issue is that the market has difficulty moving that much tombo. The AP

member said that during the summer, the quality of ahi is also weaker so people usually do boat repairs and drydock work. However, catch has been so low that more and more boats have been parked at the dock due to economic fears rather than repairs, knowing that they will lose money if they go out fishing. Catch has been down but the AP member was curious to know what the CPUE is at this time of the year compared to years past. He said the past four to five years has been really tough to find ahi and hopes it starts to pick up soon.

*The Hawaii AP acknowledge consistent themes from the fishery observations including big aku available at both ends of the Main Hawaiian Islands and harbors not being as crowded, even when fish are biting, which might indicate there hasn't been as much people fishing.*

## **B. Hawaii AP Fisheries Issues and Priorities**

Along with the issues mentioned previously under fishery observations, the AP also identified the lack of progress on the Pohoiki boat ramp as an issue for Hawaii's fisheries.

## **5. PRIA Sanctuary Designation Update**

Council staff presented on the proposed PRIA Sanctuary designation. The history of the PRIA was reviewed, along with the NMSA 304(a)(5) process that involves the Council for developing fishing regulations in the sanctuary. The Council received a letter from ONMS on June 23, 2023, requesting a response on the fishing regulations by the December 20, 2023, and including the goals and objectives of the proposed sanctuary. The Council's responsibilities are to determine whether fishing regulations are necessary, and if so, what fishing regulations should be considered. Staff reviewed the existing PRIA fishing regulations under the Council's FEPs.

An AP member asked if the proposed sanctuary is near the areas where the nuclear waste is located. He expressed concern with the proposal that would take away fishing when the north has already been taken away, and supported fishing to continue in the proposed areas.

Another AP member said that closing off an area is never a conservation solution. From the bottomfishing perspective, fishermen would not be able to overharvest because of the work involved in targeting bottomfish species. Fishermen in Hawaii already have a lot of hoops to jump through to be able to fish. He said he would support allowing and expanding fishing back into the areas to spread out the fishing pressure, and to see what fish are in those areas.

An AP member spoke about strategy, noting that the Council should not stop at saying no regulations because that can fall on deaf ears. She suggested coming up with an informal strategy to do outreach on the justification of saying why we say "no need". She expressed concern that Hawaii's elected officials in D.C. do not have understanding of these issues, and emphasized the need to educate the administration so they can help support access to resources. She also noted that fall is a new legislative season so the AP needs to get informed of MSA and other legislative issues that will be affecting the fisheries.

Another AP member agreed, noting that the burden of proof of showing that there is justification to support fishing falls on the industry, but fishermen/industry reps are not scientists. He noted the recent example of the longline fleet voluntarily moving to wire leader, when the industry understood they have to take proactive measures to be able to say they've already done

something and come to the table with that advantage. He indicated that the sanctuary issue is similar, in that the Council would need to come in with the argument that they have already done a lot to regulate the fisheries, and that is why additional regulations are not needed.

The Hawaii AP discussed the need for a sanctuary and the drawbacks of limiting fishing without a scientific need to do so. ***The Hawaii Advisory Panel recommended the Council provide the opportunity for the maximum fishing possible in the proposed PRI national marine sanctuary.***

## **6. Hawaii Initiatives**

### **A. MHI Uku EBFM Project**

Savannah Lewis, PIRO Sustainable Fisheries Division, provided a presentation on the ongoing main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) uku ecosystem-based fishery management (EBFM) project. In October 2022, PIRO, PIFSC and the Council participated in a Regional EBFM workshop. Subsequently, a Joint Regional EBFM Working Group (Working Group) was established with members from all three entities. The Working Group was tasked with developing a specific example of how EBFM can be applied in the Western Pacific region, and developing a template to help guide efforts for implementation in other fisheries. The working group decided to focus efforts on the Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) uku (blue-green snapper) fishery. The State of Hawai‘i was then invited to participate, and added two Division of Aquatic Resources staff to the working group.

The MHI uku fishery is an important commercial and non-commercial fishery, is in good condition, and is the focus of several efforts to better understand and manage the fishery. The working group drafted a three-phase approach to both develop and evaluate EBFM implementation for this fishery. Proposed work includes developing socioeconomic and ecosystem metrics, improving non-commercial data, and developing a new, flexible management framework - all while engaging the community and stakeholders wherever possible. The specific goals of this project are:

- Evaluate if the inclusion of ecosystem information can improve understanding and management of the uku population and fishery within the stock assessment framework
- Develop/Incorporate EBFM processes into the management system, including the development of a new flexible and nimble management framework
- Establish and maintain community engagement throughout the process
- Aid in developing a tangible mechanism to understand how climate change impacts a specific fishery

The Working Group’s report to the Hawai‘i AP was to provide the first progress update, begin to work collaboratively with the AP, and ensure the developed project outline is in-line with the direction the AP would like to proceed with EBFM. The AP provided feedback and ideas for community engagement

An AP member expressed concern that the scientists and managers do not fully understand the characteristics of uku. He noted that it is important to understand the annual differences. Deep 7 stock assessment improved with new inputs like currents, but uku is different from D7, and the best approach for the species needs to be used. Abe expressed concern about having quota only for the commercial fishery sector when noncommercial fishermen can continue to catch.

Another AP member suggested that for purposes of clarity of engagement, talk instead of strength and vulnerabilities to get the macro parameters, as that will encourage people sharing information when the variables are framed in that context. Johnston also suggested using existing databases to reach out to fishermen (e.g., Council's mailing lists, fishing clubs, "if lost" stickers).

An AP member noted the 3-year timeline of the project is not long enough to see what is happening on the water. He said there are a lot of variables, for example where there are a lot of uku bites, there are also sponges. He said community engagement is important, and suggested engagement through hosting tournaments or going to existing tournaments.

The vice Chair said there are a lot of noncommercial fishermen who participate in the fishery but do not report their catches. He said that uku is a very aggressive fish. He recommended that AP members are involved in the process. He also recommended kayak tournaments as well as talking to shoreline fishermen. Kualii provided general support for the project.

Lewis acknowledged the AP's comments and emphasized the importance of building a management structure that is suited to the character of the species and the fishery, and encouraged continued engagement from AP members on this project.

***The Hawaii AP recommended the Council request NMFS/EBFM project to engage the Hawaii AP members for the community engagement portion of the project.***

#### **B. DAR's Rulemaking on Kona Crab**

David Sakoda, State of Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources, provided a presentation on Kona Crab regulations being revised by the state of Hawaii. He gave a background on the history of the Kona crab regulations and the purpose of revising the existing regulations. Changes to the regulations include the ability to keep non-berried females and an extended closed season. The fishery was assessed in 2018 and is considered healthy so these actions would reduce discards as well as protect reproductive female crabs. Public comments were collected through recent hearings and DAR is currently analyzing public comments.

An AP member asked if the Samoan crab rules would be changed as well. Sakoda said just the Kona crab rules would be changed. The AP member noted that since the sale of all female Kona crab was illegal, there wasn't much being reported. Now that the rules will change, DAR should expect a large amount of catch reported because people will be more likely to report the ones they were keeping.

Another AP asked why the closed season couldn't be adjusted to the Fall instead of adding on a month. Sakoda said the proposed closed season is based on spawning which happens during the summer months and is being extended based on comments from the fishing community.

An AP member asked about the timeline. Sakoda said it is difficult to predict but they plan on taking the revised regulations back to the BLNR in October and it could be final by the end of the year, but that is a best-case scenario.

## **7. Collecting Data**

### **A. Lokahi Fishing App Feature for Fisher Engagement**

Alex Min working with Lokahi on the fishing app. We got a grant in April for app development and putting in surveys as a key feature of the app. We also have a question and answer section to drive additional engagement with the community. Looking at data is a key point for how we measure our fisheries; how we engage fishers more and more is critical for understanding our fisheries.

An AP member said that there are some things in the fish log that may discourage people from providing information. Min said that the founder wanted to also incorporate some social media presence in the app as Hawaii fishers participate in social media networks. What they have seen beyond Hawaii from fishing clubs is that the use of broader social media is prevalent. The app is focused on fisher and community first and Min said they need to look at that more to make it easy for fishers to report. The local catch record has over 700 reports so far and he will look at sharing some of that summarized data at the Fishers Forum in September. The AP member said the app is a great idea and it is the direction the community is going to right now, especially with selling fish. He noted that data collection is the big black hole so the app is a positive movement towards filling that hole.

Another AP member asked how many users there were and how it was being promoted. Min said that since its development five years ago, there are 2,800 users signed up but was unsure with how many active users there were. The usage is dependent on the promotion of the app and that promotion was done through PIFG in the past as well as a newsletter, an online tournament, and other events. The user count continues to increase but it is still a small number and we don't know the daily use of the app.

An AP member asked if they knew how many commercial marine licensed users there were. Min responded that they don't know the exact number but in a recent survey, nearly half the users have said they hold a CML. They are running an additional survey now and will do so prior to October 1 so they can ask fishers more questions that the AP might have.

The AP agreed that the Lokahi app is underutilized and the word needs to get out for people to use and engage with the app. People want to be engaged as fishers but finding out where the information is and how to get it is valuable.

### **B. Catch-It Log-It**

The Advisory Panel had a discussion on data collection and the use of electronic reporting. Discussion on data collection and the use of electronic reporting. Council staff reported on the development of an electronic data collection application developed for the territories, Catch It Log It. The Council developed the application to voluntarily provide data for fisheries. Since then, it has been adopted by PIFSC and being used to fulfill data requirements in commercial fisheries.

The AP discussed whether electronic reporting would be useful for the Hawaii fishing community. An AP member noted that a big hurdle would be to get the State and NMFS to accept the data. A member said that there needs to be a give back to the community for the data collection program such as a prize or raffle ticket. Another member said that maybe fishers need

to pay to play, as in they should pay for a part of the quota and they will have more incentive to report.

Another member said that people use their phones religiously so if there is technology that can measure and identify fish, electronic reporting would be easier. He said the easier it is and the less work you need to do, the easier it will be to collect information. The idea of using artificial intelligence to identify species, provide length and weight estimates, location, etc. was discussed by the AP.

### **C. Smart FADs**

The vice Chair reported that the AP established a working group to discuss the development of smartFADs and asked if anyone else would want to participate in the working group. Two new AP members volunteered to participate in the working group.

The vice Chair said the group is trying to develop a FAD that has instruments that would be able to extract key information. He asked if a buoy could tell fishermen information what they would like to get from it. AP members agreed that current speed and direction, wind, biomass, water temperature, and location would all be important. The vice Chair said that it all boils down to getting funds to get the instruments and the working group will be designing a project to determine which instruments are needed, the permitting process, and a proposal for funding.

### **D. Drones**

The vice Chair said that the smart FAD discussion included putting a buoy in Maku'u, where a state FAD was removed. That discussion evolved into using a sail drone as a FAD that would move around and collect information for climate change as well as aggregate fish.

## **8. Administrative Issues**

### **A. National Seafood Strategy**

Council staff provided an overview of NMFS' National Seafood Strategy. The Strategy provides NOAA's commitment to the US seafood sector and includes goals for supporting the US seafood economy. The vision is to ensure that US seafood continues to be produced sustainably and contributes to nutritional needs, jobs, the economy, and provides opportunities for a diverse workforce. The strategy plans to achieve that by focusing on maintaining or increasing US wild capture production, increasing aquaculture production, fostering access to global markets, and strengthening the US seafood sector.

The Council's Executive Director encouraged the AP members to think about projects to address some of the strategies.

An AP member asked if there are any pilot projects out there. Council staff said that it will be part of the implementation plan for the next steps and when they do, they will likely come out to the public for discussion.

The vice Chair encouraged AP members to continue to think about projects, noting that the Secretary of Commerce has identified the seafood strategy as an important part of the Department's work. *The AP agreed that the National Seafood Strategy discussion should be added to any potential small-boat scoping activities.*

## **B. IRA Funding Discussion**

Council staff provided an overview of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding. The Councils have been allocated \$20M from the IRA funding to contribute to dynamic management and increasing fishing community resiliency in response to climate impacts. Council staff has started developing project proposals to address the IRA priorities, including climate scenario planning, regulatory review, protected species, and community engagement. The projects would need to be completed by 2027.

Simonds asked AP members of their observations on how climate change has affected fishermen around Hawaii to date. AP members provided the following observations:

- On the Hilo side of the Big Island, ahi never left. Looking at historical records and tournaments, there were distinct seasons for ono and ahi runs but the seasonal patterns have been unpredictable in recent years. The ika shibi fleet are usually out there when ahi starts biting, but in recent years, even when there's been a good troll bite, it did not necessarily translate into an ika shibi bite. There have been huge balls of akule, halalu, oama, etc. that provided good bites. Lots of the changes are driven by water temperature, currents, etc.
- On Kauai, one thing that is apparent is the fresh water/aquifers/rivers/streams are a vital source to help our ko'as and fisheries in general. If we don't have fresh water coming from the mountain to the oceans, the resources are not abundant.
- In the Hawaii longline fishery, for the last 4-5 years, the summer months have been difficult to catch fish. Traditionally a lot of boats would do maintenance on their boats during those summer months, especially the good fishermen (meaning CPUE for those months could also be further depressed because of who is still fishing in that time). Lately, more boats have tied up or put their boat up for sale because the fishing has been so bad in the summer. There needs to be a way to keep the supply/demand curve in some sort of balance that would allow fishermen to keep fishing, and those buying the fish aren't going to look for an off ramp from fresh Hawaii fish.

An AP member said the fish is there but they just don't bite. AP members were concerned since there is a social aspect to fisheries now where the younger generations may continually to use the same spot over and over for social media and deplete the area. One member noted that it is easy to go to known areas but fish are smart and you have to go through the process of learning which gear to use and figure it out.

An AP member said the AP should be thinking about the ecosystem and what the carrying capacity might be. It may be getting to a point where we won't be able to sustain ourselves and will need to invest in things like hatcheries or look at regulations where protection has led to overpopulation.

***The Hawaii AP recommends the Council incorporate the following priorities in developing proposals to address climate-ready fisheries:***

- ***Importance of fresh water sources (aquifers, rivers and streams) on fish stocks and fishing activity***
- ***Capacity building and mentorship to help the younger generation of fishermen to learn from experienced fishermen about the importance of sustaining resources through***



*generational knowledge associated with fishing practices, including seasonal and cyclical patterns driven by environmental factors*

- *Balancing the supply and demand to allow fishermen to keep fishing and local fish buyers to keep buying from local suppliers, including fishery exploration to optimize fishing operations in response to shifting species distribution*
- *Create opportunities to bring in local and federal agencies into the conversation early and often*

## **9. MSA Program Planning 2025-2029**

Council staff presented on the direction for revising the Council's current five-year program plan and the development of its next plan. He provided the program themes and potential projects to be worked on in the next term and solicited for input from the AP.

An AP member suggested collaboration of support and ideas to strengthen and empower leadership/elected officials. The AP has discussed this before but had not done anything on it yet. She added that younger kids may be interested in the emerging technologies section.

An AP member asked if the region is short on tools/resources, or if it is short on someone to champion the cause. Council staff responded it is both, noting that the Council cannot apply for many grants so community entities can apply for grants and carry out the projects.

## **10. Other Business**

The AP discussed what it would take to develop a mentorship program for the longline fishery. A member noted that previous generations were told to go to college and get a good education and a degree but now people have the degree but do not like the money or the job and more folks are getting into trades and making good money. In the future, it is going to be hard to find people that like to spend 270+ days on the water for \$100K+ per year and the longline fishery is thinking outside of the box on how to get people to work. For instance, they are looking at creating job boards with gigs for certain times and trips so you don't have to commit to a whole season. He said that if there is a pipeline of young local talent that likes to spend time on the water and is willing to participate, he could stand up a training program relatively quickly. While he hoped that there were resources that would be willing to entertain these ideas, he said the industry could do it quickly if they can handle a boat and manage people. The fishing is done by professional fishers.

Another member asked what the startup cost would be to join a crew. The AP member said it would cost someone nothing; they would only need to go to a protected species workshop because the vessel owner provides everything.

The vice Chair noted that the AP is working on the Fishers Forum on September 18 at the Ala Moana Hotel. The Forum is about trolling and fish diets, the importance of what you drag and matching the bait, gut contents studies, etc.

## **11. Public Comment**

Roy Morioka provided comments on the EBFM project stating that for the non-fishing scientists and managers need to have a reference baseline from which to develop an inclusive robust EBFM, as fishermen are part of the ecosystem. He also said that engaging the community after

the plan is developed handicaps the way forward. Morioka said to remember that we are islands not the continent, very different, and most dependent upon our natural resources.

## **12. Discussion and Recommendations**

The Hawaii Advisory Panel made the following recommendations:

- 1. The Hawaii Advisory Panel recommends the Council provide the opportunity for the maximum fishing possible in the proposed PRI national marine sanctuary.**
- 2. The Hawaii AP recommends the Council request NMFS/EBFM project to engage the Hawaii AP members for the community engagement portion of the project.**
- 3. The Hawaii AP recommends the Council incorporate the following needs and priorities in developing proposals to address climate-ready fisheries:**
  - **Importance of fresh water sources (aquifers, rivers and streams) on fish stocks and fishing activity;**
  - **Capacity building and mentorship to help the younger generation of fishermen to learn from experienced fishermen about the importance of sustaining resources through generational knowledge associated with fishing practices, including seasonal and cyclical patterns driven by environmental factors;**
  - **Balancing the supply and demand to allow fishermen to keep fishing and local fish buyers to keep buying from local suppliers, including fishery exploration to optimize fishing operations in response to shifting species distribution; and**
  - **Create opportunities to bring in local and federal agencies into the conversation early and often.**

The Hawaii Advisory Panel also agreed on the following work items:

- *Revising the Hawaii AP Plan for 2023-2026 to include*
  - *Include interagency collaboration and meetings*
  - *Develop an infrastructure work group*
  - *Kona crab fishery report card*
  - *Monitoring for climate variables with smartFADs*
- *Work with Council staff on including the National Seafood Strategy with the small-boat fishing community*
- *Include Tsao and Apilado to the smartFAD working group*

The meeting finished at 2:30 p.m.