

AGENCY REPORT

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Department of Land and Natural Resources,
Division of Fish and Wildlife
July 2023 - October 2023
196th Council Meeting

This report describes the activities undertaken by the Department of Land and Natural Resources regarding fisheries and conservation during the periods of July 1, 2023 - October 30, 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 June to August, 2 survey days have occurred and 13 interviews have been conducted. Of the 13 interviews, 4 methods have been utilized by fishers, 5 were trolling, 6 were bottom fishing, 2 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 June to August, 34 sample days have occurred and 38 interviews have been conducted. Of the 38 interviews, 35 were hook & line, 2 were cast net and 1 was spearfishing.

c. Data Section CREEL Updates

- Two new hires (Noelani Charley and Emina Kaipat) under WSFR were recruited and started on June 20th and July 31st to help with the collection, entry and validation of both boat-based and shore-based surveys.
- No boat-based sample days were conducted from June to July as there has been no funding for salaries to allow staff to conduct this survey.
- Funding has been made available since August 24, 2023.

ii. Commercial Receipt System (CRS)

a. Commercial Collection, Entry and Validation

- All data collected for 2023 has not been entered into any system as of August 11, 2023.
- Currently, there are 46 active participants in the CRS. Of the 46 participants, 13 are harvesters and 33 are purchasers.

b. Data Section CRS Updates

- Commercial data entry and validation is currently behind as we are straying away from using the VFP (Visual FoxPro) application and moving towards the new online application. It has been established between the Data Section and PIFSC (Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center) that the best way to move the data from VFP to SILI (Sell It Log It) and LIRI (log It Report It) was to enter current data only up to the year of 2022. 2023 data going forward will be entered on to SILI.
- Data entry from January to June 9, 2023 was contingent upon the LIRI application being ready for admin users. On June 9, DFW Data Section was given the green light by PIFSC to start entering CRS data, however, there was no funding in salaries for any staff to perform this task. As of July 21st, several sections in DFW had no access to the internet (ethernet, wifi, phone service) due to late payments that resulted in the network disconnection by the carrier. We also do not work from home.
- Commercial collection has been put to halt as funding for salaries has been deficient and the funding for the new fiscal year was deferred, contingent upon the CNMI's Single Audit or a way around it. Commercial collection has officially resumed as of August 24, 2023.
- Training for data entry on LIRI will occur once wifi has been reinstated.

iii. DFW Coral Reef Program

- Sampling efforts for target reef fish species will continue
- Continued efforts on writing and researching for the DFW Coral Reef Management Plan
- Assessed damages following an incident of destruction of fish habitat
- engaged and consulted on intergovernmental coral restoration efforts
- Began compiling and analyzing fish habitat data from FY23 lagoon surveys
- Reviewed permits relating to coral disease and capacity building opportunities
- Made gains in coral species identification capacity in preparation for upcoming surveys through trainings with coral taxonomist Doug Fenner
- Assessed and reported on the current Managaha swim zone boundaries and the effect of tourism in the area on coral and fish habitat
- Procured items, including camera and survey equipment, for upcoming fish habitat surveys
- Refined methods of sampling to address coral species of greatest conservation need
- Refined survey methodology for fish habitat in general
- Continued researching feasibility of land-based coral nursery in the CNMI
- Attended intergovernmental collaborative meetings relating to coral reef management

3. SFF Projects Updates

The Department of Lands and Natural Resources (DLNR) will provide an update on SFF-IX Garapan Fishing Base updates.

- SFF # 9 2017 - Garapan Fishing Base Improvements - Under the Garapan Fishing Base, phase 1 and 2 completed under SFF-9 project award. Phase 3, is now being worked and is anticipated to be completed by the October 2023.

4. Other-Fishery Activities

DLNR Endangered Species Program (ESP)

- DLNR ESP received confirmation on the successful renewal of their ESA Section 6 Cooperative Agreement with US FWS.
- DLNR ESP was awarded traditional section 6 funds for FY 24 to continue ongoing projects (Marianas Crow Conservation and Conservation of Endangered Plants on Rota). The program's competitive proposal submitted last year on "Fadang Conservation (*Cycas micronesica*) was also awarded and will begin October 1, 2023.
- In this reporting period, DLNR ESP received three sea turtle reports from the general public and agency employees. Two reports were sea turtles that were injured (one from a boat strike and another from a shark attack).
- Year 3 funds for the Sea Turtle Program were awarded and made available to the agency.
- The sea turtle public outreach specialist conducted two outreach events which includes the 39th Saipan International Fishing Tournament registration day (254 individuals reached) and the 5th ISLA Mafuti Derby (211 individuals reached).
- ESP manager and turtle public outreach specialist participated in two grants training. One was hosted by the Council and the other was hosted by NOAA.

CNMI's Coral Reef Initiative Coral Restoration Coordinator

- DLNR recently filled this position (Kalani Reyes) who started working since May 1, 2023.
- Coral Restoration Coordinator was introduced to the Coral Reef Restoration Working Group on 05/07/2023 and provided a summary of meeting notes to participants
- Restoration coordinator was able to attend the IndoPacific Restoration Exchange workshop in Guam from July 31-August 4 along with members of DCRM, JAMS, and MINA to facilitate the exchange of restoration techniques and information with participants from Am. Samoa, Guam, and Hawai'i and presented alongside the restoration technician on restoration challenges in the CNMI Government at the Restoration Symposium
- Restoration coordinator continues to hold regular meetings on the use of restoration funding with heads of DLNR, BECQ to ensure responsible and adaptive use of funding
- Restoration coordinator attended a three day training with other DLNR staff on Federal Grants Management offered by WESPAC in August to gain familiarity with grants management
- Restoration coordinator hosted the first Restoration Skills Training workshop to a total of 10 people (including six MINA TASI Watch Rangers) at DCRM on August 4, 2023
- Restoration coordinator hosted a second Coral Restoration Working Group meeting virtually on 8/28/23 and will provide a summary of meeting notes to participants
- Restoration coordinator is continuing efforts on updating and completing the CNMI 2021 Restoration Action Plan

5. Rulemaking and Legislation

CNMI DLNR-DFW data sharing agreement has been completed.

Data staff have already begun implementing the mandatory data recording and reporting implementation plan (MDRRIP).