



Fishing Industry Advisory Committee

November 27, 2023

2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Web Conference

MEETING REPORT

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mike Goto, Chair, opened the meeting and welcomed members and other participants. FIAC members in attendance were Goto, Baron Miho, Sean Martin, Lino Tenorio, Eric Kingma, John Kaneko. Others in attendance included Clay Tam (Advisory Panel), Savannah Lewis (PIRO), Lynn Rassel (PIRO), Jason Mehlinger (PIRO), Justin Hospital (PIFSC), Hing Ling Chan (PIFSC), and Tammy Harp. Staff in attendance were Kitty Simonds, Mark Fitchett, Asuka Ishizaki, Josh DeMello, Zach Yamada, Felix Penalosa, and Felix Reyes.

2. Status Report on Previous FIAC Recommendations

Council staff reviewed the status of recommendations from the June 2023 FIAC meeting, including some noteworthy recommendations. The Council took up previous FIAC recommendations on electronic monitoring (EM) and staff is working with PIFSC and PIRO on a pre-implementation plan for EM that will be reported to the Pelagic Plan Team in May 2024. The Council also took up the FIAC recommendation to specify for 2024 bigeye tuna territorial catch and allocation limits: 2,000 metric ton catch limit for each Participating Territory, of which each Territory may allocate up to 1,500 mt to U.S. longline vessels, but with total transfers not to exceed 3000 mt. Staff is working with PIRO to finalize that to rulemaking. The FIAC also followed up on the National Seafood Strategy, preparing a letter on the Strategy implementation (at this meeting below). Following up on the FIAC recommendations on a proposed Pacific Remote Island (PRI) Marine National Sanctuary, the Council preliminarily found that the existing fishing regulations under the current structure may already meet the goals and objectives of the proposed sanctuary.

3. Roundtable update on Fishing/Market Issues/Impacts

Members from each of the 4 island areas provided updates on issues on each of the areas. In the CNMI, the weather has been poor over the last 2 to 3 months, with lots of storms disrupting fishing. 8-10 earthquakes have occurred around the islands and near Japan, which have negatively affected fishermen. Spearfishing has been the dominant fishing method lately.

In Hawaii, an increase in catch rates tuna has been seen, especially large yellowfin tuna to the south of the Hawaiian archipelago. The market has been saturated with yellowfin tuna for the poke market. A few swordfish vessels are currently out fishing, many of whom are trying to get one trip in before the end of the year. Members have not yet heard on how sword fishing is going so far this fall and winter season.

4. Multi-Year U.S Territorial Bigeye Tuna Catch and Allocation Specifications (Action Item)

Council staff presented on the final action to specify multi-year catch and effort allocation limits for 2025-2026. The multi-year specification would be implemented under Amendment 11, which the Council recommended at the 173rd meeting, to remove the requirement for establishing catch limits prior to establishing allocation limits, and to allow the Council to recommend multi-year catch and/or allocation limits in regulations. Based on the 2023 WCPO bigeye tuna stock assessment, the stock is not overfished and no overfishing is occurring, and stock projections show increases through 2051. At the upcoming 197th meeting, the Council is considering specifying bigeye tuna specifications for catch limits for one or more U.S. Participating Territories, and allocation limits from U.S. Participating Territories to U.S.-flagged longline vessels. The Council decision may be affected by a December WCPFC meeting decision on U.S. longline bigeye tuna catch limits.

FIAC members noted that funding is being provided by the Hawaii longline fishery (via the Hawaii Longline Association, HLA) to the territories for fisheries development, which is important for both the fishery and the territorial partnerships. HLA will be seeking a higher U.S. longline bigeye tuna catch limit at the WCPFC meeting in December. Alternatives will change a bit if a new catch limit is achieved. Overall, based on analyses the FIAC noted the bigeye tuna stock will not be significantly affected by any increases in catch from the U.S. fishery. Council staff noted the bigeye tuna stock is projected to increase based on current levels of fishing and with proposed U.S. catches.

The FIAC agreed that Council action to modify the framework to allow multi-year limits is good. The longline fishery several years ago was closed in the in region due to paperwork and completing necessary processes to approve specifications. The FIAC wants to avoid those potential outcomes and supports the consideration of the action of Amendment 11.

FIAC supports timely implementation of the Amendment 11. FIAC supports the Council taking action on the multi-year bigeye tuna specifications, recognizing that the outcomes of the WCPFC meeting may change the appropriate numbers for the specifications.

5. Proposed Fishing Regulations in the Proposed PRI Sanctuary (Action Item)

Council staff presented options for developing fishing regulations for the proposed Pacific Remote Islands (PRI) National Marine Sanctuary. As part of the sanctuary designation process under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council was provided the opportunity to determine if fishing regulations were necessary and develop those regulations if appropriate. The Council, at its 196th meeting, preliminarily recommended that existing fishing regulations are sufficient to meet the goals and objectives of the proposed PRI national marine sanctuary, and will be considering final action at the upcoming 197th meeting. The FIAC was asked to consider whether existing fishing regulations in the PRI to advise the Council on whether they are comprehensive.

FIAC members sought clarification if this was a final action like most other actions. Council staff clarified that this action is different from the usual amendment type of action since this is the decision point. No changes are to be made to the Council's FMP or FEP.

FIAC members stated that no other regulations are needed. They also noted that endangered species like leatherback sea turtles do not nest in the PRI. HLA has maintained that it would like to see access opened to U.S. waters around Johnston Atoll, which would take a Presidential declaration. Executive

Director Simonds interjected that the Council has requested fishing access for some parts of the PRI, including Johnston Atoll and Jarvis Island.

The FIAC would like no changes to regulations and to maintain the status quo in the meantime. However, it was noted it does not seem practical to prohibit commercial bottomfishing in the PRI, but allowing non-commercial bottomfishing.

FIAC finds that existing fishing regulations are comprehensive and sufficient, and recommends no new fishing regulations for the proposed PRI sanctuary. The FIAC further finds that prohibition on commercial fishing around Johnston and Jarvis are unnecessary for protecting highly migratory species.

6. FIAC Members' Letter on National Seafood Strategy

Council staff provided an overview of a letter developed inter-sessionally, as recommended at the August 2023 FIAC meeting to address the implementation of the National Seafood Strategy. The letter addressed three of the four goals in the National Seafood Strategy and how to best implement the Strategy. The Strategy needs to define what 'climate-ready fisheries' entails, define the seafood sector (does this include importers and buyers?), and address the roles of the Councils. The FIAC notes that while the Strategy is appreciated, most of the actions of NMFS towards U.S. fisheries seem to overregulate fisheries, which is counter to the Strategy's goals. The FIAC notes that many of the tasks outlined in the National Seafood Strategy seem to be the existing responsibility of NMFS and should not be considered a novelty in accomplishing the goals of the Strategy. Goals can be achieved by removing some regulations, assisting in inter-agency labor issues to streamline foreign crew entry and exit, and enhance workforce development.

FIAC members noted that resiliency and long term sustainability of our fisheries is important. These Strategy goals are aspirational goals to increase fisheries promotion and marketing but at the same time there are incongruous actions taking place as well.

Council staff was asked to elaborate on the use of FishWatch. The Councils collectively had requested NMFS to allow U.S. fisheries to utilize FishWatch as a marketing tool for responsible and healthy fisheries. NMFS declined the use of FishWatch, citing that NMFS cannot be involved in commercial enterprise or marketing.

The FIAC endorses the draft letter to address the implementation of the National Seafood Strategy, and recommends the Council to send the letter to NMFS.

7. PIFSC Social-Ecological and Economic Systems Survey Updates

Justin Hospital and Hing-Ling Chan, PIFSC Social-Ecological and Economic Systems (SEES) Program, provided updates on PIFSC economic surveys and a new study on the Economic Contributions of Fisheries to American Samoa and other new publications. Recently published PIFSC economic surveys include the 2021 Hawaii small-boat survey and 2021 American Samoa small-boat survey. Ongoing survey analyses include the 2022 National Benchmark Survey on Direct Marketing, the 2022 Hawaii non-commercial expenditure survey, the 2023 Hawaii longline cost-earning survey, and 2018 Marianas small-boat fishing survey. Upcoming surveys through 2025 include the American Samoa longline fishery, Marianas small-boat fishery, and the Pacific Islands regional charter/for-hire.

A FIAC member asked if there are planned surveys with the seafood markets domestic versus international on price. Market is saturated because of imported yellowfin tuna, so the FIAC asked if there is any sense as to the value of imported yellowfin. Hospital said the seafood market surveys are something they are interested in.

Chan added that the SEES group is working with other PIFSC scientists to investigate the impacts of cookie-cutter shark depredation and quantify associated economic losses to the fishery based on product quality.

A FIAC member asked for clarification discerning between non-commercial and 'in-kind exchange' fisheries. Hospital noted that surveyed individuals opted in whether they used their vessel for non-commercial fishing. The survey form is framed in terms of non-commercial fishing trips and expenditures. There is sort of a catch distribution breakdown that they typically have where they ask broadly about how much fish that respondents caught in the past 12 months. These data go into the baseline numbers for the economic contributions analysis that are presented in those annual fisheries economics reports. There is a non-commercial section in those annual reports and they have used the baselines of this expenditure profile that they have just collected. It will be used in future reports for generating those economic contributions.

Chan next presented on a recently published technical memo to evaluate the economic contributions of three U.S. commercial fisheries in American Samoa. Three distinct economic effects of the fisheries are evaluated in this study: direct, indirect, and induced effects. The direct effects include the ex-vessel values of the fish landed in American Samoa, the crew and captain employment, and their income. The indirect effects of the fisheries include the upstream effects from the fishing operations, such as the costs associated with fishing vessel operations like fuel, food, gear. These vessel expenditures generate cascading economic effects through supporting industries that create business-to-business purchases in the region. Model results show that the indirect and induced output effects in American Samoa from the three fisheries in 2019 are between \$291.5 million to \$292.5 million, which are equivalent to more than a quarter (28%–29%) of the total output in American Samoa in 2019. Value-added effects range from \$142.1 million to \$143.0 million, representing more than one-fifth (22%) of 2019 GDP in American Samoa. Total employment effects range from 3,480 to 3,500 jobs, which represent 20% of total employment within American Samoa in 2019. The labor income effects range from \$74.3 million to \$74.9 million, representing 18% of total labor income in American Samoa in 2019.

A FIAC member asked if local fish consumption increases, if sales impact will be affected. Chan responded that it would, but most the products are exported.

The FIAC asked if the impacts of U.S. fleets delivering to American Samoa was assumed to be 70% of cannery contributions in the model. Chan confirmed.

Council staff asked how the 4.3 multiplier ratio of landing value to expanded output value compared to other fisheries. Chan stated that this was consistent with other U.S. fisheries. Staff followed-up asking if there was a multiplier for the Hawaii fishery. Chan said one has not yet been estimated.

The FIAC recommends PIFSC conduct seafood market surveys, including determination of the value of imported yellowfin tuna into the Hawaii market.

8. Inflation Reduction Act Proposal

Council staff presented on a proposal for Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds. The funds will be distributed to the Councils in two stages, and must be directed to governance projects that must be completed within the 3 year funding window. Detailed project proposals are due on January 31, 2024, and are being developed around the four priorities of scenario planning, regulatory review, protected species, and community engagement.

The FIAC supports the four project priorities under development for the Council IRA proposal.

9. WCPFC Meeting Preparations

Council staff provided an overview of the agenda items for the upcoming WCPFC meeting in Rarotonga the following week. Major agenda items include revising a tropical tuna measure – specifically recognizing an American Samoa local purse seine fleet and an increase in U.S. longline quota. Other key issues include planning for revising a South Pacific albacore measure and addressing climate change. American Samoa is looking to get a footnote in the new tropical tuna measure to exempt American Samoa from fishing aggregating device (FAD) closures for their claimed local purse seine fleet.

FIAC members expressed optimism with the potential increase in U.S. bigeye tuna longline catch limit, noting that opposition has not been heard to date through any of the bilateral meetings. However, the singular focus for Hawaii is increasing that catch limit.

FIAC members noted the purse seine fleet has the largest impact on the tropical tuna stocks and are the largest player. Skipjack management procedure is a limiting factor in that sector to increase its effort limits. Despite the politics, the U.S. has not been given an outright ‘no’ in increasing its longline catch limit.

A FIAC member and former WCPFC Commissioner noted that there have been years of stagnation with no improvement for the U.S. fishery and the situation now is the closest the U.S. has had for a longline bigeye tuna catch limit increase.

Executive Director Simonds stated that this year’s Commission decision to increase the U.S. longline catch limit for bigeye tuna is “ours to lose”, but that will require some bargaining on vessels days on the high seas for the U.S. purse seine fishery.

10. Other Issues

There were no other issues discussed.

11. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

12. Discussion and Recommendations

Regarding the Multi-Year U.S Territorial Bigeye Tuna Catch and Allocation Specifications:

1. FIAC supports timely implementation of the Amendment 11. FIAC supports the Council taking action on the multi-year bigeye tuna specifications, recognizing that the outcomes of the WCPFC meeting may change the appropriate numbers for the specifications.

Regarding the Proposed Fishing Regulations in the Proposed PRI Sanctuary:

2. FIAC finds that existing fishing regulations are comprehensive and sufficient, and recommends no new fishing regulations for the proposed PRI sanctuary. The FIAC further finds that prohibition on commercial fishing around Johnston and Jarvis are unnecessary for protecting highly migratory species.

Regarding the National Seafood Strategy:

3. The FIAC endorses the draft letter to address the implementation of the National Seafood Strategy, and recommends the Council to send the letter to NMFS.

Regarding PIFSC Social-Ecological and Economic Systems Survey Updates:

4. The FIAC recommends PIFSC conduct seafood market surveys, including determination of the value of imported yellowfin tuna relative to domestic caught yellowfin tuna, into the Hawaii market.

Regarding the IRA Proposal:

5. The FIAC supports the four project priorities under development for the Council IRA proposal.

Meeting adjourned at 4:20pm.