

**National Marine Fisheries Service  
Pacific Islands Regional Office**

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**REPORT TO THE 200th  
WESTERN PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL MEETING**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO) is responsible for assisting the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) in the development of fishery management plans and amendments, initiating Federal fishing regulations, issuing Federal fishing permits, and monitoring fisheries. Other major responsibilities include the conservation and recovery of protected species, conservation and restoration of marine habitats, including the Pacific marine national monuments, and coordination with international organizations to implement fishery agreements and treaties. The following information is provided to update the Council on NMFS activities since the 199th Council meeting.

**SPOTLIGHT****Offshore Wind in the Pacific Islands Region**

In April 2024, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) announced an [Offshore Wind Leasing Schedule](#) that includes potential wind farm development in Hawai'i and Guam in 2028. To begin the leasing processes, BOEM [reconvened the BOEM Hawai'i Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Force](#) on August 22, 2024, and [initiated the Guam Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Force](#) on September 11, 2024. PIRO and the Pacific Island Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) have fully engaged with BOEM and NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) in their process of delineating Wind Energy Areas, including participating in both Task Forces, and will continue to coordinate and collaborate.

**Pacific Islands Regional Equity and Environmental Justice (EEJ) Implementation Plan**

We are pleased to share that we have finalized our first [NOAA Fisheries EEJ Implementation Plan for the Pacific Islands Region](#) (Plan). The Plan represents the efforts by NMFS to improve the ways in which we serve our Pacific Island communities. The Plan reflects our deep commitment to advancing [EEJ](#), including more equitable treatment, opportunities, and environmental benefits for all people and communities, while building on continuing efforts and partnerships with underserved and underrepresented communities. We make that commitment tangible by identifying specific actions that will help us be more responsive to the needs of Pacific Island communities. This living document is reflective of the collaboration and communication between the PIRO, PIFSC, Council, and communities and local agencies within the Pacific Islands to address regional priorities and interests. We continue to welcome feedback from all communities at any time.

## RULEMAKING

On July 16, 2024, NMFS published a notice requesting comments on extending an existing Pacific Islands Region Seabird-Fisheries Interaction Recovery Reporting information collection ([OMB 0648-0456](#)). Hawaii longline vessel operators are required to: 1) notify NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) when a short-tailed albatross (*Phoebastria albatrus*) is hooked or entangled during fishing operations; and 2) fill out a recovery data form. NMFS welcomes comments on the collection of information through September 16, 2024.

On July 25, 2024, NMFS published a 12-month finding and proposed rule in response to a 2016 petition to list 10 species of giant clams as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) throughout their respective ranges ([89 FR 60498](#)). NMFS is proposing to list six species due to their extinction risk (five endangered, one threatened) and an additional four species due to their similarity of appearance hindering enforcement of illegal import/export, which is allowed under ESA section 4(e) in special cases. NMFS held a series of in-person public forums and hearings throughout the Pacific Island territories, including American Sāmoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and Guam. Comments on the proposed rule are due October 23, 2024.

On July 31, 2024 NMFS published a final rule ([89 FR 61356](#)) implementing an annual catch limit (ACL) of 82,000 lb and annual catch target (ACT) of 75,000 lb for bottomfish in the CNMI for fishing years 2024 and 2025. The rule became effective August 30, 2024. As an accountability measure (AM), NMFS would reduce the ACL and ACT in the following fishing year by the amount of the overage if the average catch from the most recent 3 years exceeds the ACL.

On August 1, 2024 NMFS published a Notice of Availability ([89 FR 63155](#)), followed by a proposed rule on August 20, 2024 ([89 FR 67402](#)), to implement Amendment 7 to the Fishery Ecosystem Plan for the American Samoa Archipelago to discontinue the rebuilding plan for American Samoa bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) based on the results of the 2023 benchmark stock assessment. NMFS also proposes to implement new single-species annual catch limits and accountability measures for American Samoa BMUS for fishing years 2024 to 2026. The proposed rule would also establish indicator species for two BMUS that were unassessed in the 2023 benchmark stock assessment. NMFS is accepting public comments on the NOA until October 1, 2024 and on the proposed rule until October 4, 2024.

On August 6, 2024, NMFS published an interim final rule to change the U.S. longline bigeye tuna catch limit in the western and central Pacific Ocean from 3,554 metric tons (mt) to 6,554 mt ([89 FR 63851](#)). The interim final rule implements a recent decision of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). Comments on the interim final rule are due on September 5, 2024.

## **PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

### **Directorate**

In July and August 2024, NMFS offered a series of trainings and listening sessions in American Samoa, CNMI, and Guam on grants, environmental compliance, and public participation. In total, NMFS hosted approximately 250 total session attendees across the three jurisdictions. The trainings were open to the general public, Territorial and Commonwealth staff, and other interested parties. This interactive, activity-based training took place over 2-3 days in each jurisdiction covering National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance, how NEPA intersects with Federal grants, grant proposal development, and tips and tricks for engaging in the public process.

On July 31-August 1, 2024, NMFS attended and hosted an outreach booth at the annual [Hawai'i Conservation Conference](#). Staff had the opportunity to speak with students, interns, and partner agencies about NMFS careers and current management actions.

### **Habitat Conservation**

In the last three months, NMFS has completed 9 individual essential fish habitat (EFH) consultations, as well as 8 EFH consultations reviewed using multiple programmatic consultations. The individual consultations included: Kahana Bay Boat Ramp Dock Replacement, U.S. Geological Survey Mineral Survey Expedition, Missile Defense Agency Flight Experiment Mission Flight Test Near Guam, U.S. Coast Guard Base Honolulu Berths F and G upgrades, Poipu Road Safety and Mobility Project, Oahu's Waimea River Bridge Repairs.

NMFS, USFWS, and CNMI released the final management plan and environmental assessment for the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument (MTMNM) on June 6, 2024. The plan provides for the collaborative management and community stewardship of the MTMNM for the next 15 years. NMFS, USFWS, and CNMI prepared the final management plan with input from comments received during the 150-day public comment period from February 24, 2021 to September 22, 2021. The management plan and supporting documents can be found [here](#).

In March 2023, President Biden issued a memorandum to the Secretaries of the Interior and Commerce directing them to collaborate with Indigenous Peoples in renaming the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument to a more culturally appropriate name that reflects the Indigenous connections to the area. An interagency team was formed, including representatives from several Federal agencies and organizations, to develop appropriate naming conventions and engage with Pacific Island communities. Between December 2022 and November 2023, the Udall Foundation conducted interviews with Pacific Island representatives, revealing a consensus that the current name does not reflect the area's rich cultural heritage and that the renaming should be a careful, collaborative process. At the 13th Annual Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture (FestPAC) in June 2024, further engagement highlighted the complexity of renaming due to the diversity of languages and cultural connections. Participants suggested using an English name for the Monument to avoid conflict and emphasized a greater interest in renaming individual islands and features with traditional names.

On August 19, 2024 NMFS, USFWS, NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, and Udall Foundation co-hosted a public webinar on the PRIMNM renaming process and input gathered from FestPAC. An updated name is expected to be announced by the White House before the end of the year.

### **International Fisheries**

NMFS advanced key U.S. interests at the Ninth Joint Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) - WCPFC Northern Committee (NC) Working Group Meeting on Pacific Bluefin Tuna Management (JWG9) and the twentieth NC meeting (NC20) both hosted by Japan, from July 10-16, 2024. JWG9 and NC20 focused on management of international pelagic fish stocks such as Pacific bluefin tuna, North Pacific albacore, North Pacific swordfish, and North Pacific striped marlin. Positive outcomes include a finding that the second rebuilding target for Pacific bluefin tuna has been reached 13 years ahead of schedule, allowing for a modest increase in quota. In addition, the United States co-led discussion on how to address and incorporate the effects of climate change on WCPFC and IATTC managed stocks.

NMFS participated in the WCPFC's 20th Scientific Committee meeting, August 13-20, 2024, held in Manila, Philippines, with virtual participation included. NMFS also supported NOAA Deputy Assistant Secretary Kryc as the head of delegation to the second WCPFC Science Management Dialogue which was held online from September 9-11, 2024.

### **Protected Resources**

In July and August 2024, NMFS (Office of Protected Resources and PIRO) began hosting bi-weekly calls with each of the Pacific Island territorial government resource agencies to discuss relevant protected resources issues of interest. For these calls, NMFS offered to make available the staff leads of each current rulemaking in development affecting the Pacific Islands Region (green turtle critical habitat, coral critical habitat, oceanic whitetip shark protective regulations, and the giant clams proposed listing) to discuss them in detail and answer any questions. To date, there have been two scheduled calls with each jurisdiction (American Samoa, CNMI, and Guam) with various levels of attendance.

On September 4, 2024, NMFS participated in a meeting on Kauai to discuss Hawaiian monk seals and sea turtles. The meeting was sponsored by Hawai'i Fishermen's Alliance for Conservation and Tradition.

On November 30, 2023, NMFS published a [new proposed rule to designate critical habitat](#) for five Western Pacific coral species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in American Sāmoa, Guam, CNMI, and the U.S. Pacific Remote Island Area (PRIA). The public comment period closed on February 28, 2024. NMFS is reviewing public comments in preparation for a determination on issuing a final rule.

On May 14, 2024, NMFS Office of Protected Resources published a proposed rule to extend protective regulations to the oceanic whitetip shark under ESA section 4(d) ([89 FR 41917](#)). This proposed rule extends all of the take prohibitions under ESA section 9, with exceptions for scientific research and enforcement activities that meet certain criteria. NMFS held two public

hearings on the proposal, one in-person in Kona, Hawaii on August 20, 2024, and another virtual WebEx hearing on August 21, 2024. The public comment period was extended from July 15 to September 15, 2024.

**Sustainable Fisheries**

NMFS Observer Program is in the final stage of end-to-end, or full cycle, testing of the Onboard Record Collection Application (ORCA) at-sea. The data from these tablets was successfully submitted through the application program interface, and ingested into the Pacific Islands Regional Observer Program System (PIROPS) version, and once approved, moved into the data warehouse. Based on these successes, the Observer Program will move to fully implement electronic data collection by October 23, 2024. This change will reduce the need for paper collection methods, minimize cost, and shorten data processing time expediting data available for management decisions.

*Protected Species Workshops*

NMFS continues to provide required annual Protected Species Workshop (PSW) training to the longline fleet. NMFS offers an online PSW recertification training that may be taken two out of every three years, and a live PSW certification course weekly. The live course is offered in-person only on the first Friday of each month but otherwise runs as a hybrid course. So far during 2024, NMFS held 28 live workshops (8 in-person and 20 hybrid) and had 47 individuals register for the online PSW recertification training. These efforts led to 186 total certifications.

NMFS has also initiated a new Protected Species Crew Training Program. Training longline crew in protected species safe handling and release is a mandatory requirement from the 2023 ESA biological opinion for the Hawai'i longline fisheries, which states that at least one crew member trained in protected species handling and release must be on deck during fishing operations at all times. The first crew training session was held on April 19, 2024, with interpreters providing Tagalog and Vietnamese translation for the participants. Additional training events have been held monthly since then, training a total of 366 crew members across 89 vessels through August 2024.

<b>Crew Training Program</b>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Workshops/Day</b>	<b>Total Vessels</b>	<b>Total participants</b>
04/19/2024	3	8	26
05/10/2024	2	19	81
06/21/2024	2	23	96
07/12/2024	2	20	78
08/23/2024	2	19	85

- The Hawai'i Longline Association (HLA) has partnered with NMFS to contribute to the success of these events, including providing funds for language interpretation, t-shirts and refreshments for participants. In addition, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, Hawaii

Department of Transportation Harbor Police, Department of Homeland Security, and Council staff all provided extensive support for this effort.

Lastly, for additional outreach to fishermen, an animated PSW handling and release [video](#) is available online. NMFS has also recently made translated versions of the Tagalog, Indonesian, and Vietnamese handling and release guidelines available online as downloadable PDFs. The document links can be found on the PIRO PSW [webpage](#) and the NOAA [digital resource library webpage](#).

### *Engagement Events*

On July 8-12, 2024, NMFS and the Council convened the Western Pacific Stock Assessment Review (WPSAR) of the fishery dependent and life history data that will be used in the future benchmark stock assessment for the Guam multispecies bottomfish complex. NMFS participated in the week-long meeting as part of the WPSAR coordination committee, assisting with meeting notes, logistics, and management questions.

On July 16-17, 2024 NMFS visited eight aquaculture organizations in Kona, Hawai'i island to discuss current and future management measures for marine protected resources, and engage in relationship building and cross-disciplinary knowledge sharing. These visits, along with a lunchtime seminar/talk-story session, connected scientists and managers with aquaculture-focused businesses, non-governmental organizations and startups, increasing understanding and awareness of NOAA science and the current state of aquaculture in Hawaii.

On July 26, 2024 NMFS participated in a feed mill feasibility workshop hosted by the University of Hawaii (UH) [Center for Tropical and Subtropical Aquaculture](#). This was an industry-focused workshop supporting a UH Sea Grant-funded project to explore the potential for using fish processing wastes to produce aquaculture feed in Hawaii, particularly at a feed mill in Kapolei (Diamond Head Seafoods) on Oahu and in Hilo (UH Hilo) on Hawai'i island.

On July 30, 2024, NMFS was invited to present on U.S. fisheries management for a workshop organized by the Department of Interior's International Technical Assistance Program (DOI-ITAP). Working with the U.S. Agency for International Development, the State Department and other funding partners, DOI-ITAP activities have worked to build governance capacity in more than 60 countries. The July workshop brought in a delegation consisting of University Presidents and Governors from the Philippines. The U.S. Coast Guard and NOAA Office of Law Enforcement provided additional presentations on IUU fishing and enforcement.

On August 7-8, 2024 NMFS hosted and participated in the first in-person meeting of the Pacific Regional Invasive Species and Climate Change (RISCC) Management Network at the NOAA Pier 38 office. Pacific RISCC consists of a diverse group of climate and invasive species scientists and managers from around the Pacific Islands Region with the aim of information sharing and collaborating to create accessible products for proactive planning around the nexus of these two growing regional issues.

On August 22-23, 2024 NMFS visited Hilo to get to know potential partners and visit aquaculture facilities, as part of a new project, [He pūko‘a kani ‘āina: Safeguarding cultural connections to coral reefs in the Pacific Islands Region](#). This visit focused on individuals and organizations that we knew were hubs for connections to multiple communities and therefore a good starting point for discussions. The goal of this project is to bridge community needs with NOAA science.

During summer 2024, NMFS staff co-hosted a Hollings Scholar with Sea Grant to study the prevalence of ciguatera fish poisoning in Hawaii and a Hollings Preparation Program (HPP) intern with Conservation International to reduce seafood waste by generating products from fish skin leather. NMFS also participated in the Pacific Island Region Symposium and HPP closing webinar, where both interns presented their summer projects.

*Permits*

NMFS continues to update information on fish catch limits, available on the [website](#).

All Pacific Islands region fishing permit applications and payments are processed electronically. Applications are submitted through the National Permit System (NPS) or through Kiteworks secure file transfer. Fee payments are processed in NPS or through the Department of Treasury’s [pay.gov](#) secure online payment system. PIRO’s permit website includes [instructions](#) for fishing permit applications and for 2024 Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) certificates. Applicants may contact NMFS for individual assistance at [piro-permits@noaa.gov](mailto:piro-permits@noaa.gov) or (808) 725-5190. Applicants may also visit the [website](#) for current fishing permit status.

In 2025 through 2026, significant updates to the NPS will be underway using multi-year funding from the Inflation Reduction Act. This work will migrate all permits to the NPS and improve public access to the application process. Part of the funding will support development by NPS contractors and educational material and outreach workshops in the region to introduce the system to all the islands. It is hoped this project will facilitate region-wide access to Pacific Island Region permits.

Permits as of August 2024:

<b>Permit</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Pelagic</b>	
Hawaii longline (limited entry)	149 active, 15 inactive/no-vessel (164 of 164)
American Samoa longline (limited entry)	24 current, 36 available (60 of 60)
Western Pacific general longline	-
Receiving vessel	2
Pelagic squid jig	2
Experimental fishing permit	1
<b>Hawaii</b>	
Main Hawaiian Islands non-commercial bottomfish	-
Special coral reef ecosystem	-



<b>Permit</b>	<b>Number</b>
Precious coral	-
Crustaceans	1 (shrimp)
<b>American Sāmoa</b>	
Special coral reef ecosystem	-
Precious coral	-
Crustaceans	-
<b>Mariana Islands</b>	
Guam large vessel bottomfish	-
Northern Mariana Islands bottomfish	3
Special coral reef ecosystem	-
Precious coral	-
Crustaceans	-
<b>Pacific Remote Island Areas</b>	
Pelagic Troll & Handline	1
Bottomfish	-
Special coral reef ecosystem	-
Precious Coral	-
Crustaceans	-
<b>Marine National Monument</b>	
Recreational Fishing	-
Recreational Charter	-