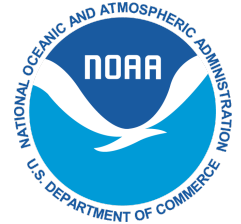


**National Marine Fisheries Service  
Pacific Islands Regional Office**

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**REPORT TO THE 202nd  
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 201st Council meeting.

**RULEMAKING**

No rulemaking updates to report since the last Council Meeting.

**PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

**Habitat Conservation**

In the last three months, NMFS has completed 12 individual essential fish habitat (EFH) consultations, as well as 11 EFH consultations reviewed using multiple programmatic consultations. The individual consultations included, but are not limited to: United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Wake Atoll Monitoring Sites Maintenance; Dredging at Hilo Harbor Pier 2; Native Vegetation Green Breaks to Prevent Wildfire, Chondria Research, Upgrades at Kilo Nalu Ocean Observatory Floating dock in Apra Harbor, Guam; Underwater Pipe Removal off the Natural Energy Lab of Hawaii Authority, Hawaii; Tuna Tagging Research; Wake Atoll Mapping Cruise; Leone Village Wetland Restoration and Agroforestry project; and the Ke'ehu Small Boat Harbor floating dock, Hawaii.

The Mariana Trench Monument Advisory Council has requested that NMFS develop outreach materials to provide information and guidance on fishing permits requirements within the Monument. NMFS is currently developing a list of Fishing Permit FAQs, that will be vetted with the Council, as a first-step to address that request.

## **International Fisheries**

At the annual Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission meeting (WCPFC21) held in Suva, Fiji from November 28 to December 3, 2024, the United States led efforts to ensure continued stability for North Pacific striped marlin and helped establish the first-ever set of binding crew labor standards adopted in an international regional fisheries management organization. WCPFC21 also adopted interim electronic monitoring minimum standards, which include technical standards, minimum data requirements, and reporting standards.

The NMFS PIRO Regional Administrator approved 13 applications by U.S.-flagged purse seine vessels to operate under the South Pacific Tuna Treaty in 2025 and 2026. This includes two new vessels that entered the Treaty late last year.

NMFS participated in the First Joint Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and WCPFC-Northern Committee Intersessional Working Groups on Pacific Bluefin (PBF) Tuna Management (JWG-01). The JWG requested that the ISC provide conversion factors between the total allowable catch of different size classes of PBF from the western and from the eastern Pacific. The JWG also succeeded in reducing the number of candidate PBF harvest control rules for members to consider ahead of the next meeting in July 2025.

## **Protected Resources**

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, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), the Pacific Remote Island Area (PRIA), and Lalo in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. In January 2024, NMFS conducted a series of public hearings and outreach engagements across the Pacific Islands Territories, including American Samoa, Guam, and CNMI to discuss the new proposal and solicit public comment. A settlement agreement previously required delivery of the final rule to the Federal Register office no later than December 1, 2024; however, the White House's Council on Environmental Quality requested, and was granted, an extension for submission of the final coral critical habitat rule. Instead of December 1, 2024, the new deadline will be July 15, 2025.

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 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, CNMI, and Guam. In response to several requests, the public comment period was extended by 120 days and closed on February 19. NMFS is currently in the process of reviewing the 29,643 comments received in association with this proposed rule

On October 2, 2024, NMFS received petitions to list 41 Indo-Pacific reef coral species under the ESA, all in the *Acropora* genus, from the Honolulu-based conservation group The Coral Conservancy. NMFS is currently reviewing the petitions and determining whether they present substantial information that indicates the petitioned actions may be warranted. For this process, NMFS is only allowed to consider the information presented within the petition and in NMFS's own files. This decision is due, to the maximum extent practicable, within 90 days of receipt of the petition. NMFS is now working on the 90 day finding.

### **Sustainable Fisheries**

NMFS staff continue to participate in national grant programs that support the management and sustainability of U.S. fisheries:

- **Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program (BREP)**: In 2025, BREP will provide \$2.3 million in funding to support applied management projects and activities to reduce bycatch. BREP provides critical funds for investigating problems and developing solutions designed to minimize bycatch of fish and protected species and reduce bycatch mortality. There are four high-priority areas for the Fiscal Year 2025 including researching new technology; encouraging technology adoption; reducing post-release mortality; and conducting international research. The Program received 73 pre-proposals this year including 13 that would benefit the Pacific Islands region which was an increase in regional participation from previous years. The group met on January 27, 2025 to discuss encouraging or discouraging full proposals, with 51 being encouraged. Full proposals are due on March 21, 2025. More information on BREP, previously funded projects, and the annual funding opportunity can be found on the BREP [website](#).
- **Fisheries Information System (FIS)**: Selected projects are funded in partnership with the NMFS National Observer Program's Electronic Technologies program and the National Catch Share Program. Funding priorities are set by the FIS Program Management Team, whose members represent a broad cross-section of state, regional, and federal partners from regional offices, science centers, and Fisheries Information Networks from all over the country. The next request for proposals (RFP) will be announced later this spring, with pre-proposals due April 11, 2025. More information on FIS, previously funded projects, and the annual funding opportunity can be found on the FIS [website](#).

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approved the extension of OMB control no 0648-0612 collection of information for the Western Pacific Community Development Program Process. The Community Development Program promotes the participation of western Pacific communities in fisheries that they have traditionally depended upon, but may not have the capabilities to support continued and substantial participation in, possibly due to economic, regulatory or other barriers. The collection includes no forms, although the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council provides instructions for preparing and submitting a community development plan. The new collection of information will expire on November 30, 2027.

### *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. The program trained a total of 328 individuals during 2024. So far during 2025, NMFS has held 7 live workshops (1 in-person only and 6 hybrid) and had 17 individuals participate in the online PSW recertification training. These combined efforts have led to 69 total certifications this year.

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. Monthly training opportunities have been provided since April of 2024 (with the exception of October 2024 and February 2025), training a total of 576 crew (unique) members representing 114 (unique) vessels, and a grand total of 632 crew members from across 156 vessels including repeat crew and vessels. See data below.

<b>Crew Training Program</b>			
Date	Workshops/Day	Total Vessels	Total participants
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
09/27/2024	2	22	91
11/08/2024	2	17	69
12/13/2024	2	13	53
01/24/2025	2	15	63

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, Hawai'i 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](#).

*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 online 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 2025 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.

PIRO renewed all 149 active Hawaii longline permits prior to the March 3rd deadline for 2025 renewals. All renewal applications were submitted and processed through the NPS and PIRO internal databases.

In 2025 through 2026, NMFS is migrating all Pacific Islands Region permit applications and processing to the online NPS system to improve public access, efficiencies and tracking. In addition to NPS system enhancements, NMFS may offer outreach events and educational materials to introduce the system to permit holders in all the islands, depending on funding.

Permits as of March 3, 2025:

<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)	20 current, 40 available (60 of 60)
Western Pacific general longline	-
Receiving vessel	5
Pelagic squid jig	2
Experimental fishing permit	-
<b>Hawaii</b>	
Main Hawaiian Islands non-commercial bottomfish	-
Special coral reef ecosystem	-
Precious coral	1
Crustaceans	4 (1 lobster, 3 shrimp)
<b>American Sāmoa</b>	
Special coral reef ecosystem	-
Precious coral	-
Crustaceans	-
<b>Mariana Islands</b>	

<b>Permit</b>	<b>Number</b>
Guam large vessel bottomfish	-
Northern Mariana Islands bottomfish	4
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	-