

Summary Report to the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council March 18, 2025

IRA Priority 4: Community Engagement and Capacity-Building to engage Pacific Islands Communities

Purpose: To understand how changes in climate impacts Pacific Island fishing communities and to leverage outcomes to improve governance of federally managed fishery resources.

Background: The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council) is leading an initiative to enhance climate resilience and fisheries management across the Pacific Islands. As climate-related and regulatory



Community Meeting in Malessso, Guam 3/4/25

challenges impact fisheries, the Council is engaging fishing communities to understand barriers to fishing, environmental changes, and potential solutions. Over the next two years (2025-2026), the Council will carry out the projects included in its IRA initiative to inform management decisions and improve the policy making process. This initiative includes four IRA priority areas:

1. Scenario Planning – Preparing fisheries for changing environmental & economic conditions.
2. Regulatory Review – Ensuring fishery policies remain relevant and adaptive.
3. Protected Species Management – Updating policies to address species interactions.
4. Community Engagement & Capacity Building – Strengthening participation in fisheries governance.

Overview of Activities: In February 2025, the Pacific Islands Fisheries Group (PIFG) began conducting community engagement under IRA Priority 4, focusing on fishing communities in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), Guam, and Hawai'i Island. In preparation for these meetings, PIFG worked with Council staff and the steering committee to develop the agenda, briefing materials, informational products and an engagement plan. To solicit participation, flyers and notices were circulated through partnering agencies and organizations, ads were placed in local papers and meeting notices were shared through social media. This document provides a briefing

on the objectives, key outcomes, and emerging themes learned from these initial community discussions. The first round of community engagement will be completed by June 2025.

Research Questions & Engagement Approach: The consultation process was designed to listen, learn, and understand how Pacific Islands fishing communities are adapting to environmental and regulatory changes. To facilitate participation and information exchange, introductory briefings were kept short and on point. Where possible, meeting spaces were arranged in a circle or hollow square to encourage healthy dialogue among community members in a facilitated forum. Participants were asked a series of questions focused on three central themes:



Tinian Harbor, CNMI 2/28/25

1. Environmental Changes:
 - Is the ocean different than in the past?
 - Have offshore currents changed?
 - Are fish stocks increasing or decreasing?
2. Fisheries Management & Policy:
 - How has existing laws and regulations impacted fisheries?
 - Do you feel represented in decision-making?
 - What improvements would you like to see in fisheries management?
3. Cultural & Future Considerations:
 - What should the next generation learn about fishing?

Summary of Key Topics from Community Voices: The communities voiced their concerns and observations based on their local environment and resources. Key topics that surfaced included:

- They are having to commit more effort to land the same amount of fish (***“trips used to be two hours, now can take all day to catch same amount of fish”***),
- Seasons are not the same compared to traditional knowledge (***“The Atulai have not come in for 2-3 years,” “Ti’ao season is off, we used to be able to know the moon phase and date the run starts, now they come in at completely different times of year”***)
- Depredation from sharks is deeply impacting their landings (***“Lucky to land 50% of bottomfish due to sharks”***),
- Restrictions from closed access due to privatization of land as well as marine protected areas (***“MPAs plus military will lose the ability to fish safely.”***)

The voices from the community noted that environmental changes are occurring, though they may not specifically fit western science classification and context, but are apparent in local communities. From nearshore to offshore observations, fishers described clear changes in their fisheries and barriers to continued participation that have both regulatory, governance, and ecosystem-based management elements.

Meetings held through March 15, 2025: These meetings provided an opportunity to engage directly with local fishers, community leaders, and stakeholders to discuss fisheries management, environmental changes, and community-driven solutions. Below is a short summary of the top 3 issues raised at each community consultation conducted. (Complete list of comments will be included in the final report)

Date	Location	Top 3 Climate/Fishery Impacts Shared
2/27/25	Saipan, CNMI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shifting seasonal runs of historic fisheries – t’iao, atulai, mafuti ● Escalating fuel prices ● Fair implementation of new permit and reporting system
2/28/25	Tinian, CNMI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Higher winds, but cooler, good wahoo runs ● MPAs/Military closures force fishers to unsafe areas ● Lack of tracking/reporting/enforcement of non-Tinian fishermen
3/01/25	Rota, CNMI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lunar phase and tides are mis-aligned ● T’iao runs usually arrive with start of mid-year lighting storms rainy season; this year arrived in February; Atulai runs missing ● Gas prices at \$7.90 prohibits trolling; young commercial spear fishermen sell catch through WhatsApp/social media
3/04/25	Malesso’, Guam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Typhoons wiped out sandbar in lagoon, buried corals, murky, shallower, extreme low tides increase water temperatures ● MPA is predator dominant impacting seasonal run fisheries ● Offshore water temps cooler, more fishermen offshore, higher gas prices limit range of fishermen
3/05/25	Dededo, Guam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Observed coastal habitat changes - sand areas now have rubble; i’e, ti’ao, mañahak runs harder to predict ● Shark depredation increasing; invasive catfish increasing ● Rare species observed - e.g. red opelu; spanish mackerel; 2024 was good marlin year
3/13/25	Kona, HI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seasonal runs are off - albacore still active, strong marlin run, average ahi size smaller, ● Depredation by sharks, porpoise increasing; sharks take 80% of fish now; porpoises take ahi up to 50 lbs (used to be 20lbs); learn to cut off lines. ● Conflicts from shark tours at FADs; increase shark abundance and safety of divers around active trolling/fishing
3/14/25	Hilo, HI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There were a lot more N NW currents and bigger waves. ● Loss of limu due to reduced freshwater flow ● Seeing more Knifejaws than in the past. ● Noticed decline of aku, with less bait fish (i.e., nehu, iao)



Community Meeting in Saipan, CNMI 2/27/25

Links to IRA Priorities 1-3: The community consultation process identified clear linkages to the other three priority areas which will be beneficial to those efforts once initiated. Several new small boat fishermen from Tinian, Saipan and Guam were identified for participation in further scenario planning efforts. Numerous issues were raised to be considered in the regulatory review of the Council's FEPs and local fishing regulations. Issues from the Mariana Islands include overlapping permit and reporting requirements between federal and local jurisdictions; catch and effort accounting from the Northern Islands and between CNMI and Guam; subpopulation stock assessments; fishing area closures due to military expansion. Regulatory issues raised from the Big Island of Hawaii included federal management of the shortline fishery, federal/state regulations in relation to shark depredation; market competition between charter and commercial sectors; protected species (Oceanic white tip sharks; marine mammals; sea turtles) impacts on small boat fisheries; and the cultural genocide from limitation of sustainable harvest of green sea turtle. A final list of issues will be included in the final report on the first round of community meetings.



Hilo, Hawaii 3/14/25

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