Western
Pacific
Regional
Fishery
Management
Council

March 28, 2024

Michael Rubino, Ph.D.
Senior Advisor for Seafood Strategy
1315 East-West Highway, 14th Floor
Silver Spring MD 20910

Dear Dr. Rubino

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council) met March 18 to 20, 2024 and expressed its concerns over waning U.S. seafood competitiveness and current barriers to optimize yield. The Council specifically requests that NOAA promote competitive US fisheries by limiting the negative impacts of "dumping" of foreign fishery products in the U.S. market that undercut the price of U.S.-caught fish. The Council also requests that you include mitigation strategies as part of the NOAA National Seafood Strategy Implementation Plan.

In the Western Pacific, the issue of foreign products outcompeting domestic products in the U.S. market is exacerbated by several other unnecessary burdens that create an uneven playing field for U.S. fisheries. Marine National Monuments that limit fishing access comprise 53% of the U.S. EEZ in our region, and a proposed National Marine Sanctuary in the Pacific Remote Islands may increase area closures. U.S.-flagged fisheries are the global gold standard in monitoring and compliance, yet the U.S. struggles to negotiate international conservation and management measures that make the U.S. and its Pacific Territorial fisheries competitive. The Council had developed its Pacific Strategy document that outlines the need for competitive U.S. fisheries as well as a document on the importance of U.S. territorial fisheries development. Both of these documents are attached to this letter.

The Council further asks that you and other NOAA staff present to the Council at its next meeting (June 2024) on seafood imports and how the National Seafood Strategy Implementation Plan will mitigate issues described in this letter and those in previous correspondence affixed to this letter. Contact us at kitty.simonds@wpcouncil.org or +1 (808) 522-8220 if you wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

William A. Sword
Council Chairman

Kitty M. Simonds
Executive Director

CC: Rick Spinrad, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere & NOAA Administrator
Janet Coit, Assistant Administrator, NOAA Fisheries
Sam Rauch, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, NOAA Fisheries
Alexa Cole, Director, NOAA Fisheries Office of International Affairs, Trade, and Commerce
Sarah Shoffler, National Seafood Strategy Coordinator, Southwest Fisheries Science Center
Council Members

Attached: (1) Letter on National Seafood Strategy Recommendations, dated December 14, 2023
(2) *Waning US Influence and Impacts to Major US Pacific Tuna Fisheries within the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO): A Call for a US Government Strategic Plan*
(3) *Strengthening Fisheries Development for US Pacific Territories: From Addressing Local Issues to the Pacific Landscape*

Western
Pacific
Regional
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Management
Council

December 14, 2023

Michael Rubino, Ph.D.
Senior Advisor for Seafood Strategy
NOAA Fisheries
1315 East-West Highway, 14th Floor
Silver Spring MD 20910

Dear Dr. Rubino:

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council) and its Fishing Industry Advisory Committee (FIAC) reviewed the National Seafood Strategy leading up to its 197th Council Meeting, held December 12 and 13, 2023. The FIAC makes several recommendations for implementation of the National Seafood Strategy in this letter that specifically addresses three of the Strategy's four goals. In addition, we seek clarification on some overarching issues. First, we ask that any implementation plan provide guidance on the roles of the Councils. We also ask that the implementation plan clearly define 'climate-ready fisheries.' The Strategy and its implementation plan should also provide a definition of what the 'seafood sector' entails – whether it includes all parts of the supply chain, including seafood buyers and importers. The FIAC and the Council note 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.

The FIAC and the Council provide suggestions for the implementation plan of the National Seafood Strategy for: Goal 1 - Maintain or increase sustainable U.S. wild capture production; Goal 3 - Foster access to domestic and global markets for the U.S. seafood industry; and, Goal 4- Strengthen the entire U.S. seafood sector.

Goal 1 - Maintain or increase sustainable U.S. wild capture production

The agency needs to invest in fishery development. As U.S. fisheries experience impacts of climate change, there will be opportunities lost and some gained. Being able to develop new fisheries or enhance existing fisheries that may become more productive, or are underutilized, are a shared responsibility of optimizing yields and opportunities. In the Western Pacific, we have Marine Conservation Plans (MCPs), which are a compendium of projects designed to ensure thriving U.S. Pacific Island fisheries and their development. At present, the only benefactor towards these plans is the Hawaii longline fishery, which contributes to territorial MCPs through specified fishing agreements. These MCPs need federal support. Attached to this letter is an information paper on this matter

NMFS needs to consider relaxing closures to U.S. fisheries, including Marine National Monuments and other fishing prohibitions. In the Western Pacific, more than half of U.S. waters are closed to fishing through establishment of Monuments. In an attached letter, dated October 6, 2023, the Council outlines its concerns over the perceived federal approach of managing fisheries through the Antiquities Act and the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, rather through the MSA. Restricting access without demonstrable benefits to production or conservation is completely counter to this goal.

Access to labor is a major production bottleneck and an efficiency barrier for our region. The implementation of the National Seafood Strategy needs to make sure that there are coordinated inter-agency efforts to streamline mechanisms to get foreign labor on fishing vessels in an efficient manner. This is the benefit for the crew as well as the operators. At present, getting crew for the Hawaii longline fishery requires expensive, highly inefficient trips to pick up foreign crew in a foreign port (e.g. 2500 nm to Mexico one direction) than through Honolulu by air. Access to crew and processing sector labor is a major impediment to USA seafood production and needs to be remedied similar to what is afforded the USA agricultural sector.

Goal 3 - Foster access to domestic and global markets for the U.S. seafood industry

In addition to relaxing unnecessary closures to fisheries, the agency needs to scale back unnecessary regulatory barriers and reconsider the utility of regulations that may not have a conservation or management value. For example, prohibition of the sale of billfish from U.S. Pacific Islands to the continental U.S. unfairly targets U.S. Pacific Islander fishermen in addition to being Unconstitutional with respect to interstate commerce. This prohibition under the 2018 addendum to the Billfish Conservation Act was formulated by recreational fishing special interests on the east coast, with no ties to the Pacific.

Goal 4- Strengthen the entire U.S. seafood sector

U.S. fisheries and their products in the supply chain need recognition and promotion. U.S. fisheries are the world leaders in terms of conservation and management. Often they rely on third party certifications for market or retail access, which come with exorbitant fees. The standards of these certifications are not even stronger than those of the MSA and other applicable U.S. laws. Rather, these fisheries, like agricultural products, need market promotion that is federally supported. FishWatch could potentially be used as a tool to do so.

The Strategy needs to address workforce development in a stronger manner. A salient concern in this region is the 'greying of the fleet' as participants are retiring or leaving the sector and not being replaced by younger participants. The Young Fishermen's Development Act was conceived in 2021 to address this issue. While an important first step, the level of funding has been inadequate for our region this far. Other programs like the U.S. Department of Agriculture grants and Saltonstall-Kennedy Research and Development Program need to be enhanced to include workforce development.

Contact Kitty Simonds, Executive Director, at +1 (808) 522-8220 or via email kitty.simonds@noaa.gov to discuss the Council's suggestions for the implementation of the National Seafood Strategy.

Sincerely,

Taulapapa William Sword
Council Chairman

Kitty M. Simonds
Executive Director

Enclosed: Map of US Pacific Island EEZ, Monuments and Sanctuaries
Information Paper on *Fishery Development of U.S. Pacific Islands*

CC: Fishing Industry Advisory Committee Members

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Waning US Influence and Impacts to Major US Pacific Tuna Fisheries within the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO): A Call for a US Government Strategic Plan

Summary

For the small island developing States across the Pacific, fishery resources – particularly tuna – are often the greatest, if not the only, natural resource available to support their national development. As a result, engagement in the fisheries sector is seen by the Pacific Island States as a litmus test for the commitment of other States to support their development aspirations. The engagement of the United States in tuna fisheries across the Pacific has declined significantly in recent years. This is due to a variety of factors, including competition from highly subsidized fleets from China and other Asian nations; exemptions granted to other fleets (but not US vessels) from strict conservation and management measures under international management regimes; positions and policies of certain Pacific Island States that are wholly adverse to US interests (including by States receiving significant amounts of US economic assistance); and the lack of any concerted US strategy to combat these factors in favor of US interests.

The diminishing role of US fisheries in the Pacific has a range of adverse consequences including 1) economic consequences for the state of Hawaii and the US Pacific Territories of American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands; 2) waning US political and economic influence throughout the region; 3) weakening national security in the face of China's growing influence and presence across the Pacific; 4) conservation consequences for the species impacted by fisheries in the region, including protected and endangered species of marine mammals, sea turtles, and sea birds; 5) weakening of regional governance and rule of law; among others.

The greatest beneficiary of diminished US engagement and influence is China. China is actively implementing a specific set of policies, programs, and investments to expand its influence throughout the Pacific specifically focusing on the fisheries sector, recognizing that the Pacific Island States see their development aspirations tied as closely to the fisheries sector as the Middle East is to oil. If the United States is to effectively stem China's rise as a regional power across the Pacific, it must develop a more holistic, high-level strategy to reinforce and reinvigorate the US posture in the Pacific, using fisheries as the influential conduit. Such a strategy requires coordination across multiple federal departments and agencies, including the Departments of State, Interior, Commerce, Defense, and Homeland Security.

I. Overview of Competing Interests in the Pacific

In post-war years, the United States maintained a strategic geopolitical position among Pacific nations, much of which was brought about through foreign assistance and economic development in Pacific Islands. This strategic position helped advance the mutual interests between the US and those of Pacific Islands and Oceania nations, particularly with respect to national security which extended to fishery interests. Many of these Pacific Islands where the US had physical presence included its overseas possessions – which were to become US Territories (American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, CNMI) and the Freely Associated States (Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Palau). Since the Compact of Free Association in 1986, the United States has provided economic assistance through trust funds, defense, and other services or benefits to Freely Associated States (approximately $270 million in 2020 obligations[1]). The Freely Associated States prove to be critical in negotiating fishery policy in the Pacific, as discussed in following sections. The United States also contributes foreign aid elsewhere throughout the Pacific, such as $2 billion of its global $51 billion 2020 aid obligations to be disbursed throughout Oceania and East Asia[1].

While the US maintains a pivotal role with respect to foreign aid distribution and global security, the US seldom has its fishery interests supported the Pacific, which should serve as a litmus test for how the US is unable to advance its interests in the Pacific in a time when it needs to counter the influence of competing countries. Such an interest includes having a US catch limit for bigeye tuna commensurate with current capacity. Advancement of US fisheries interests in the Pacific are often stymied through disagreements with beneficiaries of US aid. US fisheries also operate with inherent disadvantage relative to other competing nations, most of which are also industrialized and are vying for influence in the Pacific. Many of these competing fishing nations rely significantly on subsidies, much of which are deemed 'harmful' towards sustainability which include capacity enhancing or fuel subsidies, whereas the majority of US fisheries subsidies were deemed 'beneficial' because they enhance conservation, research, and management[2]. 55% of global fishery subsidies originate from Asia, including China which invested the greatest amount in fishery subsidies - $7.3 billion in 2018, of which 91-95% are deemed 'harmful'[1]. This contrast may be apparent whereas the registry and fishery participation of Chinese flagged tuna vessels in the Pacific has increased dramatically over the last two decades[3]. The World Trade Organization vowed to move towards reducing harmful fisheries subsidies; however progress on this front has been delayed as of November 2021 with draft negotiation text still in circulation[4].

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[1] USAID Foreign Assistance Data Dashboard, https://foreignassistance.gov/

[2] Sumaila, U.R., N. Ebrahim, A. Schuhbauer, D. Skerritt, Y. Li, H. S. Kim, T. G. Mallory, V.W.L. Lam, D. Pauly. (2019). Updated estimates and analysis of global fisheries subsidies. Marine Policy, Vol. 109

[3] *Attachment* - Informational Paper: The Rise of China in Pacific Tuna Fisheries

[4] Godfrey, M. "WTO fishing subsidies agreement draft text sent to trade ministers, raising hopes of deal" *Seafood Source* November 29, 2021

China has contributed an unknown portion of its global 2020 contribution of $4.8 billion in foreign aid to the Pacific region - to countries such as Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, and others that are supported by the United States as well. Policy analysts warn that much of this aid, as part of China's *Belt and Road Initiative*, could lead to 'debt-trap diplomacy' – a practice of issuing monetary or infrastructure assets in another country that cannot be reciprocated or repaid, thus creating leverage on that nation out of repercussion of having those assets seized. China's presence in the Pacific challenges the posture of US (and of other nations) influence. Such a presence and revisionist approaches to erode alliances and partnerships have been noted by the US Navy and the *Tri-Service Maritime Strategy* as detrimental to US naval advantages and potentially degrading to free and open international order[5]. Recently in Kiribati and the Solomon Islands, China supplanted Taiwanese influence, restored, and strengthened diplomatic relations. In Kiribati, China drafted plans to develop a large airstrip and infrastructure that could be used for military purposes, which is of concern for US national security. Chinese influence for fishing access in Kiribati is purported to have driven a decision towards opening the world's second largest marine protected area – the Phoenix Island Protected Area – adjacent to the EEZs of US Pacific Remote Island Areas (PRIAS).

Other Asian distant water fishing nations or entities (ADWFN), such as Korea, Japan, and Taiwan compete with the US through foreign aid, much of which is intended to influence fisheries specifically. For example, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that Japan had provided $172 million in grants to Federated States of Micronesia and $233 million to Palau from 1980 to 2016, plus numerous other contributions and infrastructure projects to Pacific Island nations. The Japan Trust Fund and the Chinese Taipei Trust Fund contribute significant funds for fisheries development within the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC)[6]. Aid by ADWFN may be conditional on support for donor nations' fisheries in international fora and negotiations. Fisheries are the economic common denominator and the largest shared commodity among all communities in the Pacific, including the ADWFN and the US alike.

II. Overview of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

Roughly 60% of the world's tuna supply, including the majority of US-caught tuna, is under international management of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), a regional fishery management organization (RFMO) that includes waters under US jurisdictions around Hawaii and the US Pacific Territories. The WCPFC was established by the international treaty, Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. The treaty was ratified in June 2004, based off the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement. The WCPFC serves the purpose *to ensure, through effective management, the long-term conservation and sustainable use of highly migratory fish*

[5] US Navy. 2020. "Advantage at Sea Prevailing with Integrated All-Domain Naval Power."
[6] https://www.wcpfc.int/implementation-article-30-convention

stocks in the western and central Pacific. This is achieved through a consensus-based approach to adopt resolutions and conservation and management measures (CMMs) for which members agree to abide.

The WCPFC, like other tuna RFMOs, assesses and reviews stocks through a scientific committee on an annual basis. The major tuna RFMOs manage the principal species which include tropical tunas (yellowfin tuna, bigeye tuna, skipjack tuna) and albacore stocks. The WCPFC is the only tuna RFMO for whereas these species are not overfished nor experiencing overfishing (Figure 1).

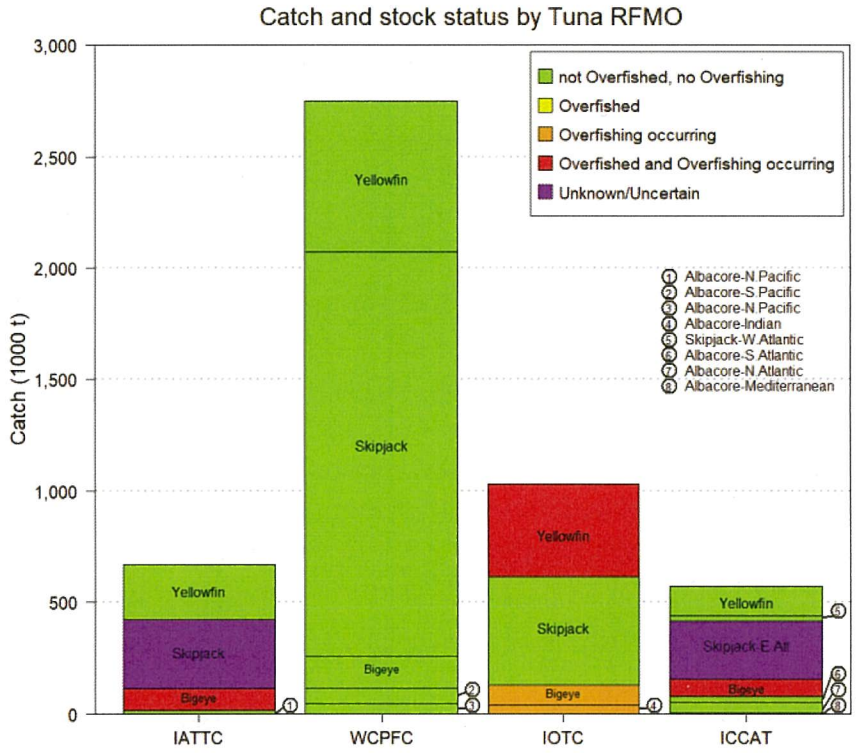

Figure 1 – Comparison of catch volume and stock status between the WCPFC and other RFMOs: International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)[7].

Conservation and management is to be consistent with Articles of the WCPFC Convention Text, which include objectives and guidelines from incorporating principles related to best available science, precautionary approach, governance, WCPFC functions, compliance, enforcement, monitoring, cooperation with other organizations, and other guidelines. One of the most important and unique considerations of conservation and management within the WCPFC is the recognition of special requirements of small island developing states (SIDS) through reducing or preventing 'disproportionate burdens' that may affect them. SIDS may have inherent

[7] Hare, et al. 2020. The western and central Pacific tuna fishery: 2019 overview and status of stocks. SPC Ocean Fisheries Programme. Noumea, New Caledonia, 2020.

economic and political disadvantages relative to larger nations such as the US, Australia, New Zealand, or ADWFN; and SIDS may be more reliant on its marine resources within their jurisdictions (inside their respective EEZs). WCPFC members are to be cognizant that shared fishery resources managed under the WCPFC are highly migratory, and thus these resources move among and outside national jurisdictions, often into the high seas where SIDS may not have the capacity to access them. The US Participating Territories are also entitled to the same considerations and privileges as SIDS. American Samoa also has a special consideration the WCPFC must consider, in that it does not have direct high seas access from its own EEZ. There are salient concerns among WCPFC members that non-compliance to CCMs and threats from illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fisheries on the high seas disproportionately impact SIDS and Participating Territories. Cooperation with developing states, such as the SIDS, to combat IUU fisheries, promote safety at sea, and strengthen compliance are notable priorities of the US Coast Guard in its 2021 implementation plan[8].

While the US has its own delegation to the WCPFC, each US Participating Territory is also recognized participant to the Commission, such that they may have their own delegation and thus attend and speak at Commission meetings on their own behalf. Having separate delegations consisting of the US and the three US Participating Territories also underscores the importance of the territories in negotiating mutual interests in the WCPFC and the need for US federal agencies work closely and in coordination with the US Participating Territories, particularly with improving relations with Pacific Island nations that may share cultural and economic commonalities.

III. US Pacific Tuna Fisheries Operating in WCPO and their Hardships

US Pacific Tuna Fisheries in the WCPO include the Hawaii-based longline fishery, the American Samoa longline fishery, and the US purse seine fishery. The Hawaii longline fishery is a limited-entry two-sector fishery (capped at 164 vessels) that targets bigeye tuna and swordfish, operating predominantly on the high seas around the Hawaiian archipelago. The American Samoa longline fishery targets albacore, but fishes exclusively in the US EEZ around American Samoa. Both the Hawaii and the American Samoa fisheries operate using vessels less than half the size of competing foreign longline vessels with fewer crew, do not transship, and far exceed all mandatory observer coverage requirements[9]. Many regard the Hawaii and American Samoa longline fisheries as the gold standard with respect to compliance and monitoring within the WCPFC. The US purse seine fishery operates almost exclusively in waters between 10°S and 10°N, targeting skipjack tuna that supplies canneries in American Samoa and throughout the Pacific.

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[8] US Coast Guard. 2021. "Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing Strategic Outlook and Implementation Plan".
[9] *Attachment*- Uneven Playing Field for U.S. Longline Fleet within the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO)

Hawaii Longline Fishery

The Hawaii longline fishery is recognized as a 'fresh fish' fishery, in that it packs bigeye tuna on ice for the purpose of consumption as poke and sashimi to supply the US market and Hawaii locally. The fishery is the most important domestically managed tuna fishery in the United States, supplying nearly 60% of the ex-vessel revenue of US-landed tuna fisheries, excluding canned tuna, and is the leading domestic US supplier of swordfish. The fishery contributes over $105 million annually[10] in ex-vessel dockside revenue to Hawaii alone and is a significant component to the Hawaii economy, local culture, and food security. The Hawaii longline fishery has additional value in supporting thousands of jobs and supplying the local restaurant industry and vast tourism industry.

Despite the national importance that the Hawaii fishery has in the geopolitical footprint of the US in the Pacific, the US has been unable to negotiate a fair US longline catch limit for bigeye tuna that is representative of fleet capacity, historical production, and demand. At present the US has a longline bigeye tuna catch limit of 3,554 mt, which is the lowest catch limit for six countries with specified catch limits[11,12].

At the 18th Regular Session of the WCPFC (WCPFC18) in December 2021, the US proposed increasing the US longline bigeye tuna catch limit by 3,000 mt, based on the rationale that a significant portion of catch remains unutilized by other members and such an increase would not undermine conservations objectives. The WCPFC Science Committee noted that the 'temperate region', which includes the region where the Hawaii fishery exclusively operates has some of the lowest levels of regional depletion and offered scientific advice with the goal to increase bigeye fishery yields but reduce any further impacts on the spawning biomass in the tropical regions[13]. The delegations of the US and US Participating Territories also submitted analyses further demonstrating that increases in US fishing privileges do not create disproportionate burdens for SIDS and may have positive benefits for SIDS and Participating Territories[14]. Despite scientific support and demonstrable evidence that an increase of US longline bigeye tuna catch would pose no conservation risk or hardship to other members, the US was rebuked and was placed into a defense posture at WCPFC18. As a result, the US is to retain its catch limit through 2023.

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[10] Data from: WPRFMC Stock Assessment and Evaluation Reports https://www.wpcouncil.org/annual-reports/

[11] *Attachment*- Annual Western and Central Pacific Bigeye Tuna Longline Catch Limits Adopted by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

[12] WCPFC CMM 2021-01 Conservation and Management Measure for bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean

[13] WCPO Bigeye Tuna Stock Status and Management Advice, https://www.wcpfc.int/doc/01/bigeye-tuna

[14] Assessments under CMM 2013-06 for Proposed and Potential Provisions of a New Conservation and Management Measure for the Tropical Tuna Stocks, 18th Regular Session of WCPFC, WCPFC18-2021-TTM-DP09

American Samoa Longline Fishery

The American Samoa longline fishery has declined in participation and fishery performance since 2007, declining from over 5,000 mt catch to under 1,200 mt in 2020[10]. In 2007, the ratio of Chinese to US catch South Pacific albacore was approximately 1:1. Since that time, Chinese catches of South Pacific albacore are over 20 times that of the US. In 2018, the WCPFC adopted an interim target reference point to increase biomass with the goal to increase biomass and resulting catch-per-unit effort (CPUE). WCPFC members have suggested a reduction in fishing effort in the South Pacific targeting the stock, noting that the stock has gradually declined and CPUE has declined even greater. Despite all of this, the stock is not overfished, nor experiencing overfishing. However, regional depletion in waters around American Samoa is the highest in a region comprised mostly of EEZs of Pacific Island States[15]. There is little to no chance of an interim target reference point for the stock being reached under status quo levels of catch and effort[15]. Therefore, there was a need for WCPFC18 to possibly revise the CMM 2015-02 for South Pacific albacore to encompass the entire stock distribution and develop harvest strategies. Unfortunately, the WCPFC18 made no progress on reducing catches towards a biomass target and instead was fixated on reducing catches on the high seas, while substantive level of catches are extracted from areas inside EEZs around American Samoa. Meanwhile, fishery performance and profitability for the American Samoa fishery continues to decline due to increasing disproportionate burden, despite being entitled to special consideration as a SIDS.

US Purse Seine Fishery

From 2018-2020 the US purse seine fishery caught and landed an annual average of 202,415 mt of tuna, of which on average of 78,879 was offloaded in American Samoa[16] to supply the local StarKist cannery in Pago Pago. Viability of the only remaining cannery is existential for the American Samoa economy and directly tied to the success of all American Samoa fisheries – including the American Samoa longline fishery. GDP of American Samoa dropped 18.2% from 2007 to 2019[17], following closure of a cannery in Pago Pago. The remaining StarKist cannery needs assurance of product supply to maintain business. US purse seiners have been offloading on average of 39% of catch among all US-flagged vessels in Pago Pago from 2016-2020[13]. From 2005-2007, 76% of those vessels were offloading in Pago Pago[13]. While total tonnage has been relatively consistent, there is room to expand and increase the amount of product from US vessels offloading in Pago Pago as the amount of fish from US vessels offloading in foreign ports has increased.

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[15] Reference Document for South Pacific Albacore for the Review of CMM 2015-02 and Development of Harvest Strategies under CMM 2014-06, 18th Regular Session of WCPFC, WCPFC18-2021-18

[16] Data provided by NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office, Honolulu, HI

[17] Government Accountability Office, https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-467

However, from 2018 to 2021, the US purse seine fleet declined from 34 vessels to 13 vessels, considerably lower than the peak of US purse seine operations with 60 vessels in previous decades. Many of these vessels re-flagged from the US to avoid perceived stringent restrictions on allowable fishing effort on the high seas, access fees for US vessels under the South Pacific Tuna Treaty, and FAD closures. At WCPFC18, the US proposed recognizing US-flagged purse seine vessels that operate out of American Samoa as being eligible to benefits of SIDS. The idea was rebuffed and no progress was made to recognize these vessels.

The inability for the US to progress and advance its interests in the WCPFC will undoubtedly have negative consequences – not only on the economies of Hawaii and the US Pacific Territories, but also for conservation and management of marine resources. When US fisheries cannot contribute adequately to meet demands, they supplanted by foreign fisheries that do not have regulatory equivalencies to the Magnuson-Stevens Act, Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, National Environmental Protection Act, and other applicable laws to that US fisheries are beholden to. Supplanting US fisheries would likely lead to higher catches of sea turtles, mammals, birds, sharks, and other species in loosely regulated foreign fisheries. These fisheries are often not as well monitored and do not have the level of monitoring and surveillance as US fisheries. Diminishing the relevance of US fisheries in the Pacific also diminishes the political capital of the US to advance conservation and management measures that benefit marine life.

IV. Dynamic Political Landscape in the WCPFC

The WCPFC political landscape is driven by blocs of likeminded participating members, either linked by geographical, cultural, or economic commonalities. The US is often dismissed by delegations at the WCPFC, likely due to animus towards the US that may be residual from unrelated or past disagreements. With Pacific Islands, the animus is likely predicated on the notion that the interests of Pacific Islands are counter to those of the US and the lack of progress (or perceived willingness) by the US to find common ground with those nations. In contrast, ADWFN, despite cultural or political differences, tend to find themselves in mutual agreement among one another with respect to conservation and management negotiations.

Most Pacific Island nations are generally unified by their membership to the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA). FFA members generally support interventions and negotiations by other FFA members. Eight Pacific Island nations comprise the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA), which have specific interests regarding fishery management in the highly productive waters around the Equator.

To ameliorate any perceived or substantiated disproportionate burdens for SIDS in negotiating conservation and management, the FFA and PNA often promote a rationale to balance fishing effort and/or catch between waters within SIDS jurisdiction and waters on the high seas. Presumably, WCPFC members would utilize high seas waters or within their own

jurisdiction at no access cost, but would access another nation's jurisdiction (such SIDS) at an associated cost. This rationale is referred to as 'zone based management'. US fisheries do not have access to most of the US EEZs in the WCPFC Convention areas due to establishment of Marine National Monuments and other closures, hence access to the high seas is important for the US. Zone based management is integrated in the WCPFC tropical tunas CMM through implementation of a vessel day scheme (VDS). Within the VDS, WCPFC members are limited to purse seine effort on the high seas, balanced with effort limits within member EEZs. WCPFC members are also subjected to seasonal restrictions on the use of fish aggregating devices (FADS) on the high seas and within EEZs. SIDS may declare registered vessels exempt from seasonal FAD closures on an annual basis.

This privilege of FAD exemptions for SIDS often comes with debate at the WCPFC, out of concern that these exemptions undermine conservation precaution for bigeye tuna without due diligence of scientific review or may be misused by partnering distant water nations. In 2020, nearly one third of purse seine vessels in the WCPFC had declared exemptions from FAD closures, including 14 Chinese-flagged purse seiners operating through agreements with Kiribati[18]. Meanwhile, US-flagged purse seiners are subjected to FAD closures, effort limits on the high seas, and may not have incentive to remain in the WCPFC Convention Area through the year in order to supply the American Samoa cannery.

Freely Associated States comprise three of the eight members of the PNA, which render the opportunity for the US and US Participating Territories to work towards mutual goals with these nations through the Compact of Free Association (COFA) and the Micronesia Island Forum. Through COFA, the US contributed ~$170 million in 2019 to Free Associated States within a twenty year trust fund of $3.5 billion. While the US does not presently identify closely with any group of WCPFC members, which can make it difficult to garner support or open dialogues that could be beneficial, Guam and CNMI are members of the Micronesia Island Forum. External to the WCPFC, the Micronesia Island Forum is an organization *which plans for, and enhances, the quality of life throughout its member states while preserving each states diverse culture*. Improving the relationship with the Freely Associated States can be critical to improving the positions of the US and the US Participating Territories and may reduce the overall animus towards the US.

V. A Path Forward and Need for a Strategic Plan

The diminishing role of US fisheries in the Pacific can have dire consequences on US food production for the Pacific Islands and local economies. This may be indicative of waning US geopolitical influence in the region, while the present is a point in time that strengthening US positions within the Pacific is critical to countering the influences of global competitors such as China. Congressional members have demonstrated interest on this issue with proposed

[18] WCPFC Circular 2020/08, 3 August 2020: Notifications Relevant to Footnote1 of CMM 2018-01

legislation referred to House Foreign Affairs[19] and Senate Foreign Relations[20] Committees. The US Navy, US Coast Guard, and the Tri-Services Maritime Strategy identify threats to US influence and its sustained national security advantages[5,8] that could very well be resulting in part to inaction of US agencies to advance US fisheries in international fora. A more holistic, high-level strategy is needed to strengthen US interests in the Pacific, using fisheries as the influential conduit. Such a strategy requires coordination across multiple federal departments and agencies, including the Departments of State, Interior, Commerce, Defense, and Homeland Security.

A task force consisting of representatives from agencies within these federal departments need to design a roadmap for calculated actions each agency must take within a timeline in the next two years consistent with the current Administration. This task force may need to plan workshops and in-country visits. For example, Council had requested NOAA-NMFS to develop a workshop on zone-based longline management for WCPFC fisheries with cooperation with the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency. This task force could glean steps needed to assuage any disagreement or unrelated issues taken by Pacific Island countries. This may require numerous meetings of US Pacific Island stakeholders with decision makers in Washington DC. The end result must lead to increased US agency integration in the Pacific which will improve the US posture in the Pacific so it may achieve its goals for increased economic development, food security, and national security.

[19] H.R.2967 - BLUE Pacific Act. Introduced May 4, 2021 to the 117th Congress, 2021-2022.
[20] S.1774 - Honoring OCEANIA Act. Introduced May 20, 2021 to the 117th Congress, 2021-2022.

Informational Paper: The Rise of China in Pacific Tuna Fisheries

February 2017

I. Introduction[1]

China has experienced substantial growth of its fishing industry since the late 1970s with catches increasing from about 5 million tons to over 60 million tons. Historically, China's marine fisheries production was eclipsed by freshwater fisheries production and disrupted by political events such as the mid-1960s Cultural Revolution. In 2013, China's total fishery production reached 61.7 million tons, representing over one-third of the world's total fishery production. China's enormous fishing industry is supported by the world's largest fishing fleet, with nearly 200,000 marine (sea-going) fishing vessels and 2,460 distant-water (i.e., fishing on the high seas beyond China's EEZ) fishing vessels that fish on the high seas beyond China's EEZ.

Apart from being the biggest fishery producer, China has also been being the world's leading exporter of fishery products since 2002. In 2013, China grossed USD 11.6 billion surplus from its external fishery trade.

II. China's Tuna Fisheries in the Pacific Ocean

Since 2000, there has been rapid growth in Chinese longline and purse seine fisheries operating in the Pacific Ocean targeting tuna.

Longline Fisheries

Chinese longline vessels target bigeye, yellowfin, and albacore tuna, and operate in both the high seas and national waters of Pacific Island countries. Significant increases in both number of vessels and catch have been observed since 2000 (Figures 1). In 2015, 429 Chinese-flagged longline vessels operated in the Western & Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO), catching over 35,000 mt of tuna and billfish. A significant component of the Chinese longline fleet is capable of landing ice-chilled and super-frozen tuna for various markets including sashimi (e.g. bigeye) and cannery (e.g. albacore). Chinese large scale longline vessels also operate in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO), with observed increased catches since 2000 (Figure 3).

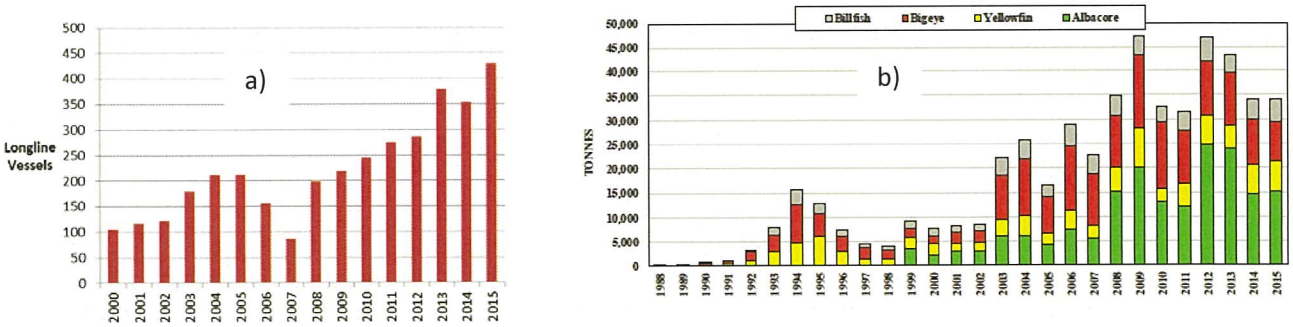

Figure 1: a) Number of active Chinese-flagged longline vessels operating in the WCPO; b) WCPO catch of tuna by Chinese longline vessels
Source: WCPFC 2016.

[1] This introductory section on China and its fisheries is freely adapted from a paper by Zhang Hongzhou (2015).

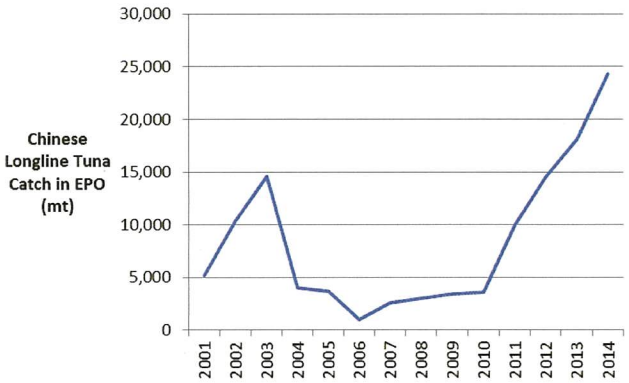

Figure 2: EPO catch of tuna by Chinese-flagged longline vessels
Source: IATTC 2015.

Purse seine Fisheries

China has a growing purse seine fishery. In 2000, there were no Chinese flagged seiners operating in the WCPO, now there are 20. The WCPO catch of Chinese-flagged purse seine vessels in 2015 was 43, 236 metric tons. China's emergence in purse seine fishing has been coupled with significant investments in onshore processing facilities under development in Papua New Guinea, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Marshall Islands, and Kiribati. Onshore investments are typically coupled to fishing access agreements to the EEZs of certain Pacific Island countries.

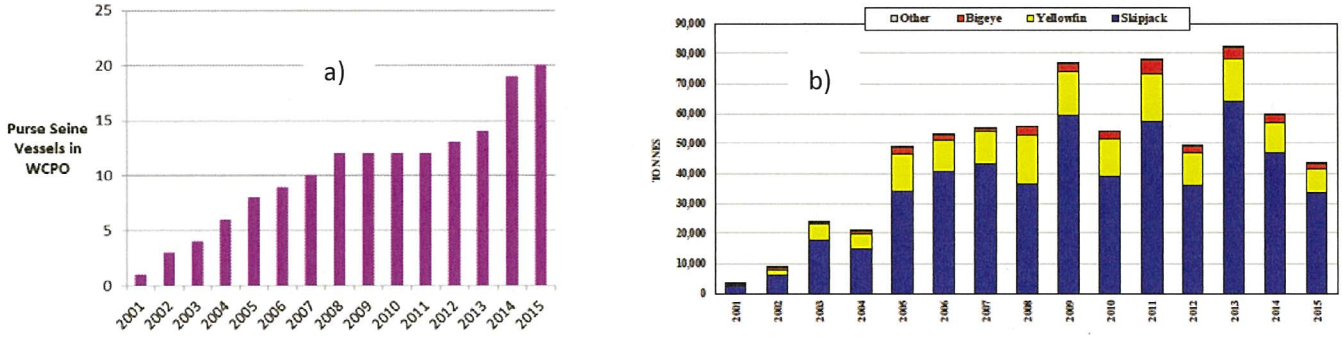

Figure 3: a) Number of Chinese-flagged purse vessels operating in the WCPO; b) WCPO catch of tuna by Chinese purse seine vessels
Source: WCPFC 2016.

III. Chinese Government Subsidies[2]

China subsidizes its distant water tuna fleets to levels unmatched globally. In its 11th five-year plan (2006-2011), China's central government's 'going global' strategy was emphasized, as it announced that it intended to actively support domestic enterprises abroad. Part of this strategy includes a set of incentives and subsidies to continue expanding its distant water fleet. These include subsidies on fuel, vessel construction, preferential tax treatment and payment for access to other nation's EEZs (Table 1).

[2] The following section on China's subsidies for its fishing industry is freely adapted from paper by J. Ilakini and R. Imo of the Forum Fisheries Agency (2014).

Table 1: Tax incentives and Direct Subsidies by the Chinese government to its distant water fleets

Tax Incentives	Direct subsidies to the fishing industry
• Corporate tax relief • Tax incentives to shipyards • Tariff cuts on imported equipment • Accelerated depreciation	• Fishery research, development and exploration and technology transfer • Fuel offsets • Access fees • Favorable industry loan rates

Source: Ilakini and Imo 2014.

The extent and magnitude of the subsidies and other support given by the Chinese government to its DWF sector is significant and likely to provide the Chinese DWF with significant cost advantage over unsubsidized fleets. The extent of Chinese subsidies and tax incentives appears to be growing under each five-year plan. Operators of other fleets operating in the WCPO longline fishery feel that they may soon be rendered economically unviable due to their cost disadvantage.

IV. Influence in Western and Central Pacific

It is no coincidence that China's rapid growth in fisheries also coincided with its growing influence in Oceania. Since the early 2000s, China has been an aggressive player in Oceania in search of natural gas, minerals, fish, and other raw materials. China provides hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign aid to governments of Pacific small island developing states. In many cases, the aid includes infrastructure projects, which are constructed by Chinese firms employing non-local Chinese workers. There are numerous articles that describe China's increased interest in Oceania and its mounting influence over Pacific Island countries. See the following reference list for further reading.

V. Competition with US fisheries

Chinese longline vessels are supplying the same US markets that are supplied by US longline fleets operating out of Hawaii and American Samoa. Chinese vessels are also competing for fish on the same fishing grounds, often fishing side by side with Hawaii longline vessels on the high seas adjacent to the US EEZ around Hawaii.

VI. Conclusion

China's rapid growth in Pacific tuna fisheries since 2000 has served to overcapitalize fisheries and has led to stock declines in bigeye and albacore fisheries. Significant government subsidies for Chinese vessels lessen the impact of reduced catch rates, which allow Chinese vessels to outcompete fleets of other nations including the United States. The expansion of China into Pacific tuna fishing is undermining US influence in the region, and exacerbating our seafood trade deficit through the influx of Chinese caught tuna supplied to US markets.

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Uneven Playing Field for U.S. Longline Fleet within the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO)

Issues	US Fleets	Competing Foreign Fleets
WCPO Bigeye Tuna Longline Catch Limits in metric tons (mt)[1]	3,554 mt (lowest of nations with specified limits)	Japan: 17,765 mt; Korea: 13,942 mt; Chinese Taipei: 10,481 mt; China: 8,724 mt; Indonesia: 5,889 mt; Small Island Developing States: no limits
Longline Fleet Size and Capacity Limits in WCPFC (September 2020)[2]	Hawaii-based:145 longliners active, capped at 164 American Samoa-9 active, capped at 60	Japan: 420; Korea: 118; Chinese Taipei: 618; China: 506; Indonesia: 0.
WCPO Average Longline Vessel Size (Tonnage, mt)[2]	82 mt	Japan: 182 mt; Korea: 410 mt; Chinese Taipei: 127 mt; China: 384 mt; Vanuatu: 454 mt; Average International Vessel: 221 mt
WCPO Average Longline Vessel Crew Size[2]	6 crew	Japan: 15; Korea: 25; Chinese Taipei: 15; China: 19; Vanuatu: 24; Average International Vessel: 16 crew
National Fishery Subsidies[3] ('Beneficial' subsidies in parentheses). Values in USD[3]	$3.4B ($2.2B in "beneficial" subsidies); $21M/yr Tuna Treaty,	China: $7.3B ($434M); EU: $3.8B ($1.5B); Korea: $3.2B ($1.5B); Japan: $2.8B ($534M); Chinese Taipei: $787M ($69M). Chinese subsidies deemed to be 91-95% 'harmful'
Reported 2019 Longline Fishery Observer Coverage[5] (minimum requirement is 5% in international waters)	By effort (hooks fished): 18% By trip: 22.9% (deep-set), 100% (shallow-set)	By effort (hooks fished): China:2.1%; Japan: 2.7%; Korea: 3%; Chinese Taipei: 7.4%; Indonesia: 0% By days fished in international waters: China: 5.3%; Japan: 6%; Korea: 11%; Chinese Taipei: 5.5%, Indonesia: N/A
Reported 2019 WCPO Longline Transshipment Events[5]	None	China: 299, Japan: 249, Korea: 129, Chinese Taipei: 1,015
Reported 2019 WCPO Longline Transshipment of Bigeye Tuna (mt)[5]	None	China: 6,339 mt, Japan: 187 mt, Korea: 8,357 mt, Chinese Taipei: 7,646 mt
Import/Export of Tuna Products to/from United States in 2019 (in mt and USD)[6]	Export Tuna: 2,805mt, valued $13.3 M Export Bigeye tuna: 64 mt, $491K	Import Tuna: 282,777 mt, valued $1.875B China: 3,025 mt; Korea: 2,304 mt; Japan: 1,371 mt; Chinese Taipei: 1,555 mt; Indonesia: 30,674 mt; Thailand: 105,514 mt; Vietnam: 39,155 mt; Philippines: 13,017 mt Import Bigeye tuna: 4,974 mt, $35.5M

[1]WCPFC CMM-2018-01 Conservation and Management Measure for Tropical Tunas, Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), www.wpcfc.int

[2]WCPFC Record of Fishing Vessel Registry, September 2020, www.wcpfc.int

[3]Sumaila, U.R., N. Ebrahim, A. Schuhbauer, D. Skerritt, Y. Li, H. S. Kim, T. G. Mallory, V.W.L. Lam, D. Pauly. (2019). *Updated estimates and analysis of global fisheries subsidies.* Marine Policy, Vol. 109

[4]16th Regular Session of the WCPFC Compliance Monitoring Report, December 2019, www.wcpfc.int

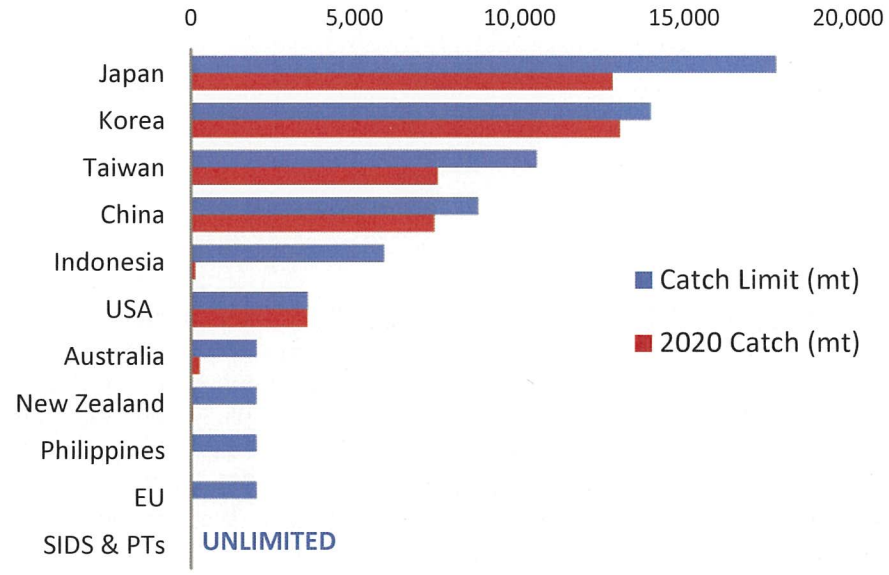
[5]16th Session of Technical and Compliance Committee of the WCPFC, September 2020, www.wcpfc.int

[6]NOAA Fisheries Foreign Fisheries Trade Data https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/sustainable-fisheries/foreign-fishery-trade-data

Annual Western and Central Pacific Bigeye Tuna Longline Catch Limits Adopted by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

Catch Limit Allocations Adopted in 2018 (renewed in 2020, 2021) expiring at the end of 2023

Member States	2020 Catch (mt)	Catch limit (mt)
Japan	12,791	17,765
Korea	13,011	13,942
Chinese Taipei	7,519	10,481
China	7,416	8,724
Indonesia	122	5,889
USA	3,548	3,554
Australia	283	2000
New Zealand	50	2000
Philippines	0*	2000
European Union	30	2000
Small Island Developing States and Participating Territories	N/A	No Limit



WCPFC Members: Australia, China, Canada, Cook Islands, European Union, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, France, Indonesia, Japan, Kiribati, Republic of Korea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Chinese Taipei, Tonga, Tuvalu, United States of America, Vanuatu.
Participating Territories (PTs): American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Tokelau, Wallis and Futuna
Cooperating Non-member(s): Ecuador, El Salvador, Liberia, Mexico, Panama, Thailand, Vietnam.
SIDS: WCPFC Members deemed "small island developing states"

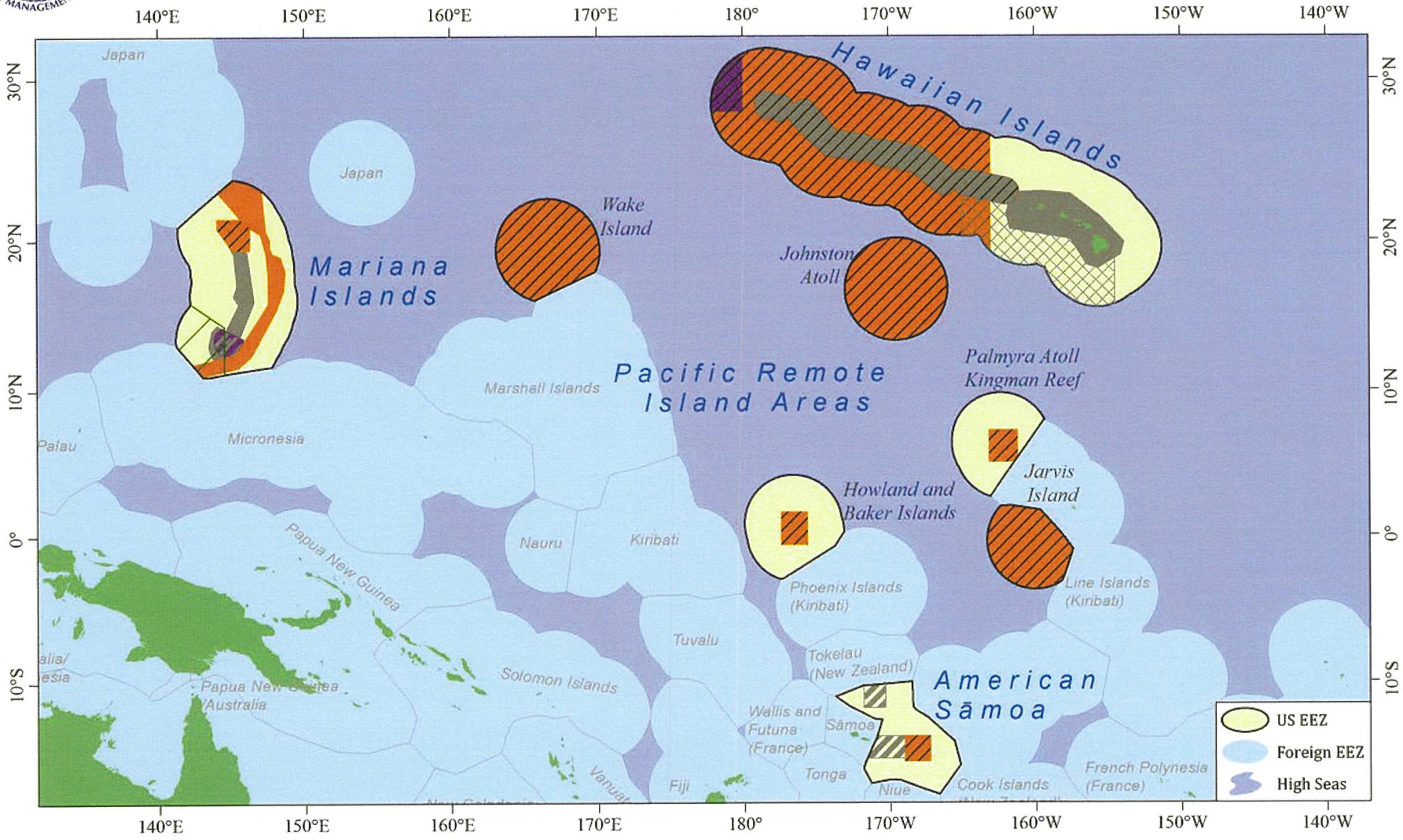
US EEZ Regulated Fishing Areas, Western Pacific Region

Magnuson-Stevens Act

- Longline fishing prohibited (1991 - 92, 2011)
- Large Vessel Prohibited Area (2002)
- False Killer Whale Southern Exclusion Zone (2012)
- Guam No Anchor Zone (2004)
- Bottomfish/Groundfish fishing prohibited (1986)
- Bottomfish Vessels ≥ 50 ft prohibited (2006)
- US EEZ: trawling, drift gillnets, poisons and explosives prohibited (1986 - 2004)

Antiquities Act

- Marine National Monument (2006 - 2016)
- Closed to all commercial fishing



WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Strengthening Fisheries Development for US Pacific Territories:

From Addressing Local Issues to the Pacific Landscape

1. Introduction and Background

This information paper provides three key components of information: (1) an overview of the underserved fishery-dependent economies of the three U.S. Pacific Territories of American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and Guam; (2) fishery development needs and aspirations; (3) importance of fisheries for the U.S. Pacific Territories in terms of food security and socioeconomic resiliency. The purpose of this information paper is to underscore the need to prioritize investment by federal agencies for fishery development in the three U.S. Pacific Territories that is consistent with recent legislation, mandates through Executive Orders, and the overarching geopolitical agenda of the U.S. Food security, economic development, social significance of fisheries to the underserved U.S. Pacific Island communities, and strengthening the U.S. Pacific Territories' relevance in the greater Pacific community are among the rationale for investing in fishery development.

While each of the U.S. Pacific Territories have local fisheries caught and managed within territorial and U.S. waters, tuna fisheries are the largest and most influential economic driver among the international Pacific Islands landscape as whole[1]. Tuna stocks around the three U.S. Pacific Territories are managed through the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). Within the WCPFC, the U.S. Pacific Territories are entitled to special rights and privileges afforded to small island development states (SIDS) and *Participating Territories* under Articles 30 and 43 of the WCPFC Convention Text. The aspirations for U.S. *Participating Territories* and their economic disadvantages are recognized internationally by the WCPFC.

Aspirations of the U.S. Pacific Territories, their fishery development needs, and prioritized projects are addressed through Marine Conservation Plans (MCP) for American Samoa[2], CNMI[3], and Guam[4]. These MCPs identify conservation and management objectives and prioritize marine conservation projects for the purpose of improving fishery monitoring, local capacity building, and ensuring food security for island communities through sustainable fisheries. The MCPs are developed by the Governor of each U.S. Pacific Territory and are applicable for three-year terms. Projects associated with these MCPs are almost exclusively funded through specified fishing agreements between Hawaii-based U.S. longline fishing vessels and each territory's government. U.S. domestic regulations[5] authorize specification of catch limits of longline-caught bigeye tuna for U.S. Participating Territories. Each U.S. Participating

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[1] WPRFMC. 2022. *Waning US Influence and Impacts to Major US Pacific Tuna Fisheries within the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO): A Call for a US Government Strategic Plan.* 17 pp.
[2] https://www.wpcouncil.org/fisheries/american-samoa-archipelago/
[3] https://www.wpcouncil.org/fisheries/northern-mariana-islands-mariana-archipelago/
[4] https://www.wpcouncil.org/fisheries/guam-mariana-archipelago/
[5] https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/chapter-VI/part-665/subpart-F/section-665.819

Territory may allocate a portion of that limit to U.S. longline fishing vessels based out of Hawaii through specified fishing agreements.

Guam and CNMI are members of the Micronesia Islands Forum (MIF)[6], which membership also includes each of the four states of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Palau. The goal of the MIF is to plan for and enhance the quality of life throughout its member states while preserving each state's diverse culture. The MIF is critical for bridging shared economic and social objectives, which may include fishery aspirations. In 2019, the MIF reaffirmed the commitment of each of the participants, on behalf of their people and their governments, to establish closer ties, strengthen cooperation, and agree on initiatives for the benefit of members and the entire Micronesian Region.

2. Contrasting Issues for American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam

2.1 American Samoa: A Local Tuna-Driven Island Economy

American Samoa has a population of nearly 50,000, 84% of which are Samoan and three percent of which are other Pacific Islanders.[7] American Samoa's culture is based around *Aiga* (family) and 54% of the population lives below the U.S. poverty line.[8] Tuna fishing and processing have long been an important part of American Samoa's economy, with offloading from longline vessels starting in the 1950s and offloading from purse seine vessels starting in 1970. The first cannery was built in 1949, and a second was constructed in 1963. Currently, one cannery operates in American Samoa. The economy is heavily dependent on the well-being of the tuna cannery and the American Samoa-based longline and purse seine fleets.

Total tuna exports are valued at about $353 million per year, with canned tuna making up 99.5% of the total value of exports[7]. Employment in the tuna industry represents over 80% of private employment in American Samoa, and the cannery provides jobs not only to citizens of American Samoa, but also to many nationals of other Pacific Island countries and territories, particularly Samoa, Niue, Tokelau, and Tonga. Port calls by longline and purse seine vessels are important for supplying fish for processing to the cannery, and also for supporting the local economy through purchases of fuel, supplies, and services. In 2017-2019, there were 247 purse seiner calls at Pago Pago, each representing about $400,000 in local purchases, averaging about $33 million per year. However, there has been a steep downturn in port calls since 2020[9] which corresponds to a recent decline in tuna offloading in American Samoa and associated economic losses affecting the local economy.

Tuna deliveries to Pago Pago by purse seiners averaged less than 100,000 mt each year in 2017-2019[8]. Almost 85% of the purse seine vessels offloading in American Samoa are from U.S. flagged vessels[8], and a reduction in the size of the U.S. fleet in recent years (40 vessels in 2015

[6] https://www.mifsecretariat.org/
[7] American Samoa Statistical Yearbook 2018 and 2019, American Samoa Department of Commerce
[8] GAO 20-467 https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-467
[9] American Samoa Port Administration

to 12 vessels in 2022) has resulted in a significant decline in landings to the cannery in American Samoa.

U.S. vessels have reflagged largely to other Pacific Islands nations. The reasons include economic conditions and regulatory requirements like the fish aggregating device closures and high seas fishing effort limits, which have made operating conditions less favorable. In addition, some vessels have shifted operations to the eastern Pacific. As result, cannery employment in 2021 had declined by 30 percent, and the reduction in port calls to American Samoa is estimated to have resulted in an economic loss of $56 million annually to American Samoa. Loss of the tuna industry would increase energy and freight costs in American Samoa by about 30 percent.[10]

American Samoa also has a longline fleet that primarily targets albacore and catches other pelagic species such as yellowfin and skipjack. This fleet operates within the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and occasionally also fishes on the high seas. In 2020 and 2021, 11 longline vessels fished, and participation in this fleet has been declining over time due to lack of profitability associated with low catch rates. American Samoa also has a small-scale troll fleet that fishes entirely within the portion of the U.S. EEZ around American Samoa, primarily for skipjack and yellowfin tuna and several local bottomfish fisheries.

MCP objectives for American Samoa include: (1) Maximize social and economic benefits through sustainable fisheries; (2) Support quality scientific research to assess and manage fisheries; (3) Promote an ecosystem approach in fisheries management; (4) Recognize the importance of island culture and traditional fishing in managing fishery resources and foster opportunities for participation; (5) Promote education and outreach activities and regional collaboration regarding fisheries conservation; and (6) Encourage development of technologies and methods to achieve the most effective level of enforcement and to ensure safety at sea. The American Samoa MCP includes specific projects for the construction of docks and boat ramps, the construction of a fishery co-op with ice machines in the remote outer islands like Manu'a. Through an MCP-supported project, some vessels in the local longline fleet have begun diversifying their operations to trolling methods for albacore on the high seas to increase revenue opportunities during the 'low season' for fishing within the U.S. EEZ around American Samoa.

2.2 Mariana Archipelago: Driven by Military and Tourism, with Asian Influence

2.2(A) *Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands*

The CNMI has a population of almost 54,000, and its main industries are tourism-related. Over fifty percent (~52.3%) of CNMI residents live below the U.S. poverty line. Citizens of Freely Associated States (FAS) under the Compact of Free Association with the U.S. which include the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Palau, comprise 5% of the CNMI population. CNMI reported $9.8 million (USD) in expenditures associated with FAS citizens[11]. The 2016 unemployment rate of CNMI was 14% – nearly four times greater than that of the U.S. (4.7%) and Palau (4.2%, 2005 estimate), but was lower than unemployment rates in

[10] Estimate by American Samoa Chamber of Commerce
[11] GAO 20-491 https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-491

the other FAS[12]. Approximately 10,000 to 22,000 temporary workers from neighboring Asian and Oceania nations, including 2,535 workers from FAS[17], sought employment in CNMI from 2011 to 2017, many of which were engaged in fishing or fishing related industries[18].

Historically, U.S. purse seine vessels transshipped while longline vessels were based in CNMI, but currently troll vessels are the only commercial fishing operators for pelagic fish in CNMI, and they primarily target skipjack and yellowfin. CNMI has significant fisheries development potential and aspirations as described in its MCP[2]. MCP objectives for CNMI include: (1) Improve fisheries data collection and reporting; (2) Conduct Resource assessment, monitoring, and research to gain a better understanding of marine resources and fisheries; (3) Conduct enforcement training and monitoring activities to promote compliance with federal and local mandates; (4) Promote responsible domestic fisheries development to provide long term economic growth and stability and local food production; (5) Conduct Education and Outreach, enhance public participation, and build local capacity; (6) Promote Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management, Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation, and Regional Cooperation; and (7) Recognize the importance of island cultures and traditional fishing practices in managing fishery resources and foster opportunities for participation.

The U.S. EEZ around CNMI and Guam collectively span over 12 latitudinal degrees, encompassing regions with relatively low depletion for skipjack[13] and bigeye tuna[14], which underscore potential for viable sustainable fisheries. In addition to the fishing grounds adjacent to the emergent islands, a western chain of seamounts runs the length of the Mariana Archipelago. This seamount chain likely provides upwelling of nutrients that support a range of commercially important bottomfish and pelagic species[15]. CNMI's local tourism market coupled with its close proximity to Guam and large Asian markets make responsible fisheries development a key area for economic growth. Significant foreign investment is currently occurring in Saipan with the development of several new hotels and gambling centers marketed towards Asian clientele. In order to meet local demand, CNMI bottomfish and pelagic fisheries require development. CNMI fisheries development needs to include longline vessel capacity, large vessel docking space, fish processing and cold storage facilities, and training in fish handling and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point protocols.

2.2(B) *Guam*

Guam is the southernmost island in the Mariana Archipelago and has a population of almost 169,000, of which 22.4% live below the U.S. poverty line. Thirty-seven percent of Guam residents are indigenous Chamoru, 33% are Asian (including Filipinos, Koreans, Chinese, and Japanese), while 11% of the population are among ethnic groups originating from the FAS.

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[12] Ayers, A. L. 2018. The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Fishing Community Profile: 2017 Update. NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-PIFSC-66 57 p

[13] Vincent, M., Pilling, G., and J Hampton. 2019. Stock assessment of skipjack tuna in the WCPO. 15th Regular Session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee, Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia.

[14] Ducharme-Barth, N., M. Vincent, J. Hampton, P. Hamer, P. Williams, and G. Pilling. 2020. Stock assessment of bigeye tuna in the western and central Pacific Ocean. 16th Regular Session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee, Virtual Meeting. SC16-SA-WP-03.

[15] WPRFMC. 2009. Fishery Ecosystem Plan for the Mariana Archipelago. 251 pp.

Guam reported $147 million in costs associated with providing public services to FAS migrants in 2017 for a total of $1.2 billion estimated costs from 2004 - 2017[17]. The fishing community in Guam is comprised of at least 17% individuals from FAS nations and 7% Filipino.[16] The main industries of Guam are tourism and the military, while fisheries remain an important component to food security and culture.

Historically, U.S. purse seine and longline vessels were based out of Guam, but currently troll vessels are the only commercial fishing operators for pelagic fish primarily targeting skipjack and yellowfin tuna. Transshipment of fish from foreign vessels also occurred in Guam, but transshipments have not occurred in some time.

Due to Guam's tourism and military economy and diverse spectrum of resident ethnicities, local demand for seafood is high. Guam's excellent harbor facilities and local infrastructure could support local fisheries development. Existing challenges include a relatively small EEZ around Guam and the lack of fisheries training programs. Reducing limitations to fishery development are highlighted in Guam's MCP[3], which state the following priorities, in order to improve: (1) Fisheries Resource Assessment, Research, and Monitoring; (2) Effective Surveillance and Enforcement Mechanisms; (3) Promote Ecosystems Approach to Fisheries Management, Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation, and Regional Cooperation; (4) Public Participation, Research, Education and Outreach, and Local Capacity Building; (5) Domestic Fisheries Development; and (6) Recognizing the importance of island cultures and traditional fishing practices and community based management.

3. Prioritizing Fishery Development in the U.S. Pacific Territories

At present, specified fishing agreements between U.S. longline vessels out of Hawaii and territorial agreements are the only consistent source of annual funding for projects prioritized in the territorial MCPs; and that financial support is only contingent on active negotiated agreements. The need for U.S. Pacific Territories to each receive significant funding dedicated for fishery development and infrastructure to build community resiliency is also underscored within recent legislation and Executive Orders. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (2021)[17], the Build Back Better Act (2021)[18], and the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022[19] were enacted as part of a legislative framework for public investments in social, infrastructural, and environmental programs. Executive Order 14008 *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*[20] and Executive Order 12898 *Federal Actions To Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*[21] also mandated provisions for the federal

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[16] Allen, S. and P. Bartam. 2008. Guam as a Fishing Community. Pacific Islands Fish. Sci. Cent., Natl. Mar. Fish. Serv. NOAA, Honolulu,. Pacific Islands Fish. Sci. Cent. Admin. Rep. H-08-01, 61 p.

[17] https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3684

[18] https://financialservices.house.gov/issues/the-build-back-better-act.htm

[19] https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/19/fact-sheet-the-inflation-reduction-act-supports-workers-and-families/

[20] https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/

[21] https://www.archives.gov/files/federal-register/executive-orders/pdf/12898.pdf

government, including: to secure job development; enhance resilience to climate change; and protecting food security for underserved communities. The focus of these Presidential Executive Orders and legislation fully overlap with objectives of the territorial MCPs, noting that underserved Pacific Islander communities face disproportionate burdens. To date, concerted efforts dedicated for these specific purposes have not materialized.

Fisheries also provide critical dietary components, not only socially and culturally, but also to keep the community healthy through dietary habits. Based on current dietary and health trends, the diabetes rates in U.S. Pacific Territories is projected to increase and be about double the U.S. national average – with CNMI expecting to have 26% of its population diabetic by 2045.[22] In contrast, Samoa is projected to have a lower diabetes rate than the U.S. average and less than half of the projected diabetes rate in American Samoa (23%) by 2045.[21] The departure from fishery-related traditional practices and freshly-sourced diets, supplanted by imported diets and sedentary foreign-influenced lifestyles, has likely contributed to the current public health crises in U.S. Pacific Territories. Increasing fishing opportunities and access in the territories not only helps perpetuate U.S. Pacific Islander cultures on the water, but it keeps communities healthy.

Fishery participation in the territories still remains relatively low and has declined from long-term averages. Over the last decade in Guam, average annual participation in local bottomfish and reef fisheries have declined approximately 30% from historical long-term averages.[23] A similar reduction was noted in CNMI.[22] American Samoa has had consistent but low fishery participation, with just 12 vessels participating on average annually over the two decades[24]. Each territory has different infrastructural barriers to enhance fishing capacity, which are specified in the territorial MCPs. Common barriers among the territories include the lack of training for capacity building – for both fishers and local science/managers. Consistent financial support is needed for capacity building in each of the territories, as well as exploratory research to diversify fisheries in order to keep U.S. Pacific Islanders fishing and equip them to optimize their resources.

Marine infrastructure and fishery development are also linked to overarching international objectives of the U.S. For example, an increase in presence of U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) assets in the territories, accompanied by an increase in U.S. fisheries both on the water and in the markets, promote the objectives of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy[25]. However, this comes with significant need for federal investment. The U.S. Pacific Territories are situated in a region where Chinese presence is growing, which threatens the viability of U.S. commerce in the region. American Samoa's MCP includes projects related to increasing monitoring and

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[22] International Diabetes Federation, Diabetes Data Portal, https://diabetesatlas.org/data/en/

[23] WPRFMC. 2022. Annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation Report for the Mariana Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan 2021. Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council. Honolulu, Hawaii

[24] WPRFMC. 2022. Annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation Report for the American Samoa Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan 2021. Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council. Honolulu, Hawaii.

[25] Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States. February 2022. https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf

surveillance within the U.S. EEZ around American Samoa, which would require a more conspicuous USCG role. American Samoa fishermen and mariners have lamented the reliance on New Zealand in several instances, when the U.S. should have more prominent USCG presence in the territory. While there may be sufficient port infrastructure in Guam for USCG vessels, American Samoa lacks infrastructure for a full-time UCGS cutter. This renders a soft spot for U.S. presence in the region and leads to a vulnerability for safety at sea for territorial fisheries. In 2019, plans were made in CNMI for expansion of the Garapan Fishing Base so that a viable tuna fishing industry could offload catch and operate regionally out of the Marianas. To date that project is pending financial support. Guam also has aspirations to utilize its current port resources to bring back transshipments of tuna and other products to bolster its local economy and international relevance. Federal investments would be needed to revive these activities.

According to the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy, the U.S. Pacific Territories are within a region that includes half the world's population, 60% of global GDP, two-thirds of global economic growth, and 65% of the world's oceans. Considering that the U.S. Pacific Territories are at the vanguard of U.S. influence in a region where fisheries is the leading natural resource[26], significant federal financial investment in fisheries development and infrastructure is paramount.

[26] WPRFMC. 2022. *Waning US Influence and Impacts to Major US Pacific Tuna Fisheries within the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO): A Call for a US Government Strategic Plan.* 17 pp.

WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Press Release

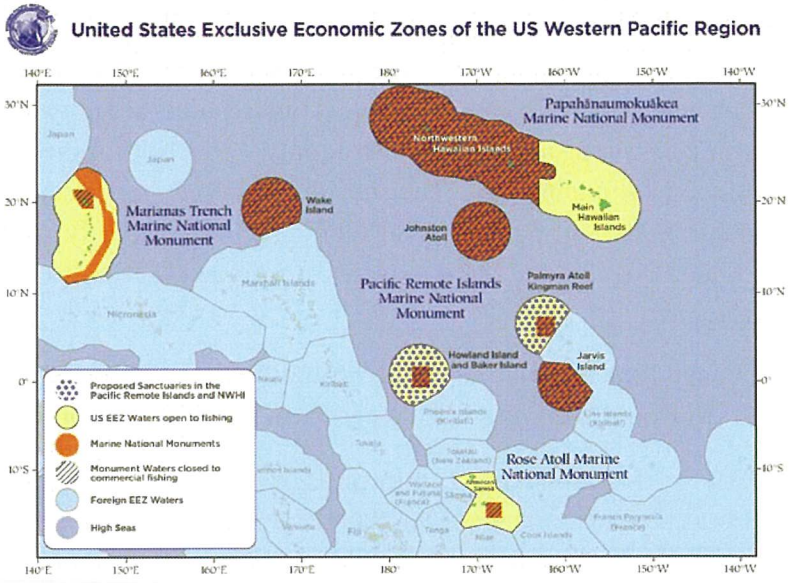
For Immediate Release

Contact: Amy Vandehey
(808) 522-8220 or info@wpcouncil.org

Fishermen Sound Alarm: US Government Policies Threaten Way of Life in US Pacific Islands

"We are affected by decisions today—we lose our fishery, culture, way of life."

HONOLULU (22 March 2024) Amidst mounting concerns and resounding frustration, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council convened its 198th meeting this week, where the voices of the fishing community advisors echoed with urgency. Their impassioned pleas highlighted the dire challenges facing the industry, including escalating anxieties over fishing area closures and the destabilizing impact of foreign seafood imports on market dynamics.



Hawai'i Advisory Panel (AP) member and Kaua'i fisherman Abraham Apilado, Jr. said, "If the goal is to sustain fisheries, major changes need to be made today. If the goal is to kill off the fishermen and resources, then keep doing what you're doing, because you're doing an amazing job."

The United States is proposing to overlay and extend the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (MNM) and potentially the Pacific Remote Islands MNM with sanctuary regulations, compounding current fishing closures (see map).

"The tuna industry is the only industry we have, the government relies on the canneries," said Gene Pan, American Samoa AP member and Fono Representative. "You are stopping us from fishing but not the Chinese. Without the people, there is no Samoa."

Council Chair Will Sword stressed, "Without the StarKist cannery, we cannot continue to sustain our cultural heritage and keep it vibrant—further disadvantaging our remaining 12 purse seine vessels in American Samoa affects our cannery."

--more--

US Fishermen Sound Alarm: US Government Policies Threaten Way of Life 2-2-2-2-2

"Our purse seine boats can't compete because it's not a level playing field," said American Samoa AP member and Cape Fisheries CEO Joe Hamby. "The Seafood Import Monitoring Program is not working. U.S. fishers and processors should be protected by a duty on fish imports—seafood security is important. Fishing or processing, it's a matter of having the political will to defend against negative impacts to domestic producers."

Eric Kingma, Hawaii Longline Association executive director, said, "We are facing unprecedented market conditions. There is a large supply of fish coming in, driven by El Niño conditions. The market isn't there because of the huge amount of imported, subsidized, gassed tuna being 'dumped' into the market and retailers are not adjusting downward during periods of high local supply of fresh tuna. Not only is this bad for the local consumer, but it's unfair to the Hawai'i fishing industry. The subsidized foreign imports and retail price gouging on fresh landed 'ahi is really hurting the Hawai'i longline fleet. Recently, vessels are averaging $2-3 per pound for high quality 'ahi, but it's over $30 per pound at the store. It's not fair to consumers or fishermen."

Council Executive Director Kitty Simonds said, "If you were the President of the United States, which would you choose—the people of the U.S. or your legacy?"

Fish Stock Assessment Limitations in the Western Pacific

Hawai'i Council Member Matt Ramsey questioned how NOAA can develop strategies to promote seafood and equity and environmental justice (EEJ), while at the same time limiting fishing opportunities. Sam Rauch, NOAA deputy assistant administrator for regulatory programs, stated, "The goal of NMFS is not to limit fishing opportunities in general. In fact, NMFS is supposed to promote optimum yield, and that is the task that both the Council and NMFS are tasked with under the Magnuson-Stevens Act."

The Council endorsed the Hawai'i and Guam bottomfish stock assessments to update catch limits. The previous Guam assessment, which found the bottomfish stock complex was overfished, used a model likely not suited for data-limited fisheries. The latest assessment, which used the same model with updated catch data, showed an improved stock condition, but not enough to rebuild the stock.

"It is one of the things we have learned particularly in the Western Pacific," Rauch said. "Models that we apply to manage fisheries for [optimum yield] elsewhere in the country sometimes break down when they are applied to artisanal, cultural or subsistence fishing, much like the type of fishing that happens in the territories."

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council: Secretary of Commerce appointees from nominees selected by American Samoa, the CNMI, Guam and Hawai'i governors: Will Sword, noncommercial fisherman/engineer (American Samoa) (chair); Roger Dang, Fresh Island Fish Co. (Hawai'i) (vice chair); Manny Dueñas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Assn. (Guam) (vice chair); Judith Guthertz, University of Guam (Guam); Pete Itibus, noncommercial fisher (CNMI); Shaelene Kamaka'ala, Hawaiian Islands Land Trust (Hawai'i); Matt Ramsey, Conservation International (Hawai'i); and Gene Weaver, CNMI Judiciary (CNMI). Designated state officials: Dawn Chang, Hawai'i Dept. of Land & Natural Resources; Sylvan Igisomar, CNMI Dept. of Lands & Natural Resources (vice chair); Chelsa Muña, Guam Dept. of Agriculture; and Archie Soliai, American Samoa Dept. of Marine & Wildlife Resources (vice chair). Designated federal officials (voting): Sarah Malloy (acting), NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office. Designated federal officials (nonvoting): Colin Brinkman, U.S. State Dept.; Brian Peck, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; and RADM Michael Day, U.S. Coast Guard 14th District.

# # # # #

Western
Pacific
Regional
Fishery
Management
Council

March 28, 2024

Michael Rubino, Ph.D.
Senior Advisor for Seafood Strategy
1315 East-West Highway, 14th Floor
Silver Spring MD 20910

Dear Dr. Rubino

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council) met March 18 to 20, 2024 and expressed its concerns over waning U.S. seafood competitiveness and current barriers to optimize yield. The Council specifically requests that NOAA promote competitive US fisheries by limiting the negative impacts of "dumping" of foreign fishery products in the U.S. market that undercut the price of U.S.-caught fish. The Council also requests that you include mitigation strategies as part of the NOAA National Seafood Strategy Implementation Plan.

In the Western Pacific, the issue of foreign products outcompeting domestic products in the U.S. market is exacerbated by several other unnecessary burdens that create an uneven playing field for U.S. fisheries. Marine National Monuments that limit fishing access comprise 53% of the U.S. EEZ in our region, and a proposed National Marine Sanctuary in the Pacific Remote Islands may increase area closures. U.S.-flagged fisheries are the global gold standard in monitoring and compliance, yet the U.S. struggles to negotiate international conservation and management measures that make the U.S. and its Pacific Territorial fisheries competitive. The Council had developed its Pacific Strategy document that outlines the need for competitive U.S. fisheries as well as a document on the importance of U.S. territorial fisheries development. Both of these documents are attached to this letter.

The Council further asks that you and other NOAA staff present to the Council at its next meeting (June 2024) on seafood imports and how the National Seafood Strategy Implementation Plan will mitigate issues described in this letter and those in previous correspondence affixed to this letter. Contact us at kitty.simonds@wpcouncil.org or +1 (808) 522-8220 if you wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

William A. Sword
Council Chairman

Kitty M. Simonds
Executive Director

CC: Rick Spinrad, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere & NOAA Administrator
Janet Coit, Assistant Administrator, NOAA Fisheries
Sam Rauch, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, NOAA Fisheries
Alexa Cole, Director, NOAA Fisheries Office of International Affairs, Trade, and Commerce
Sarah Shoffler, National Seafood Strategy Coordinator, Southwest Fisheries Science Center
Council Members

Attached: (1) Letter on National Seafood Strategy Recommendations, dated December 14, 2023
(2) *Waning US Influence and Impacts to Major US Pacific Tuna Fisheries within the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO): A Call for a US Government Strategic Plan*
(3) *Strengthening Fisheries Development for US Pacific Territories: From Addressing Local Issues to the Pacific Landscape*

Western
Pacific
Regional
Fishery
Management
Council

December 14, 2023

Michael Rubino, Ph.D.
Senior Advisor for Seafood Strategy
NOAA Fisheries
1315 East-West Highway, 14th Floor
Silver Spring MD 20910

Dear Dr. Rubino:

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council) and its Fishing Industry Advisory Committee (FIAC) reviewed the National Seafood Strategy leading up to its 197th Council Meeting, held December 12 and 13, 2023. The FIAC makes several recommendations for implementation of the National Seafood Strategy in this letter that specifically addresses three of the Strategy's four goals. In addition, we seek clarification on some overarching issues. First, we ask that any implementation plan provide guidance on the roles of the Councils. We also ask that the implementation plan clearly define 'climate-ready fisheries.' The Strategy and its implementation plan should also provide a definition of what the 'seafood sector' entails – whether it includes all parts of the supply chain, including seafood buyers and importers. The FIAC and the Council note 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.

The FIAC and the Council provide suggestions for the implementation plan of the National Seafood Strategy for: Goal 1 - Maintain or increase sustainable U.S. wild capture production; Goal 3 - Foster access to domestic and global markets for the U.S. seafood industry; and, Goal 4- Strengthen the entire U.S. seafood sector.

Goal 1 - Maintain or increase sustainable U.S. wild capture production

The agency needs to invest in fishery development. As U.S. fisheries experience impacts of climate change, there will be opportunities lost and some gained. Being able to develop new fisheries or enhance existing fisheries that may become more productive, or are underutilized, are a shared responsibility of optimizing yields and opportunities. In the Western Pacific, we have Marine Conservation Plans (MCPs), which are a compendium of projects designed to ensure thriving U.S. Pacific Island fisheries and their development. At present, the only benefactor towards these plans is the Hawaii longline fishery, which contributes to territorial MCPs through specified fishing agreements. These MCPs need federal support. Attached to this letter is an information paper on this matter

NMFS needs to consider relaxing closures to U.S. fisheries, including Marine National Monuments and other fishing prohibitions. In the Western Pacific, more than half of U.S. waters are closed to fishing through establishment of Monuments. In an attached letter, dated October 6, 2023, the Council outlines its concerns over the perceived federal approach of managing fisheries through the Antiquities Act and the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, rather through the MSA. Restricting access without demonstrable benefits to production or conservation is completely counter to this goal.

Access to labor is a major production bottleneck and an efficiency barrier for our region. The implementation of the National Seafood Strategy needs to make sure that there are coordinated inter-agency efforts to streamline mechanisms to get foreign labor on fishing vessels in an efficient manner. This is the benefit for the crew as well as the operators. At present, getting crew for the Hawaii longline fishery requires expensive, highly inefficient trips to pick up foreign crew in a foreign port (e.g. 2500 nm to Mexico one direction) than through Honolulu by air. Access to crew and processing sector labor is a major impediment to USA seafood production and needs to be remedied similar to what is afforded the USA agricultural sector.

Goal 3 - Foster access to domestic and global markets for the U.S. seafood industry

In addition to relaxing unnecessary closures to fisheries, the agency needs to scale back unnecessary regulatory barriers and reconsider the utility of regulations that may not have a conservation or management value. For example, prohibition of the sale of billfish from U.S. Pacific Islands to the continental U.S. unfairly targets U.S. Pacific Islander fishermen in addition to being Unconstitutional with respect to interstate commerce. This prohibition under the 2018 addendum to the Billfish Conservation Act was formulated by recreational fishing special interests on the east coast, with no ties to the Pacific.

Goal 4- Strengthen the entire U.S. seafood sector

U.S. fisheries and their products in the supply chain need recognition and promotion. U.S. fisheries are the world leaders in terms of conservation and management. Often they rely on third party certifications for market or retail access, which come with exorbitant fees. The standards of these certifications are not even stronger than those of the MSA and other applicable U.S. laws. Rather, these fisheries, like agricultural products, need market promotion that is federally supported. FishWatch could potentially be used as a tool to do so.

The Strategy needs to address workforce development in a stronger manner. A salient concern in this region is the 'greying of the fleet' as participants are retiring or leaving the sector and not being replaced by younger participants. The Young Fishermen's Development Act was conceived in 2021 to address this issue. While an important first step, the level of funding has been inadequate for our region this far. Other programs like the U.S. Department of Agriculture grants and Saltonstall-Kennedy Research and Development Program need to be enhanced to include workforce development.

Contact Kitty Simonds, Executive Director, at +1 (808) 522-8220 or via email kitty.simonds@noaa.gov to discuss the Council's suggestions for the implementation of the National Seafood Strategy.

Sincerely,

Taulapapa William Sword
Council Chairman

Kitty M. Simonds
Executive Director

Enclosed: Map of US Pacific Island EEZ, Monuments and Sanctuaries
Information Paper on *Fishery Development of U.S. Pacific Islands*

CC: Fishing Industry Advisory Committee Members

WESTERN
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COUNCIL

Waning US Influence and Impacts to Major US Pacific Tuna Fisheries within the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO): A Call for a US Government Strategic Plan

Summary

For the small island developing States across the Pacific, fishery resources – particularly tuna – are often the greatest, if not the only, natural resource available to support their national development. As a result, engagement in the fisheries sector is seen by the Pacific Island States as a litmus test for the commitment of other States to support their development aspirations. The engagement of the United States in tuna fisheries across the Pacific has declined significantly in recent years. This is due to a variety of factors, including competition from highly subsidized fleets from China and other Asian nations; exemptions granted to other fleets (but not US vessels) from strict conservation and management measures under international management regimes; positions and policies of certain Pacific Island States that are wholly adverse to US interests (including by States receiving significant amounts of US economic assistance); and the lack of any concerted US strategy to combat these factors in favor of US interests.

The diminishing role of US fisheries in the Pacific has a range of adverse consequences including 1) economic consequences for the state of Hawaii and the US Pacific Territories of American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands; 2) waning US political and economic influence throughout the region; 3) weakening national security in the face of China's growing influence and presence across the Pacific; 4) conservation consequences for the species impacted by fisheries in the region, including protected and endangered species of marine mammals, sea turtles, and sea birds; 5) weakening of regional governance and rule of law; among others.

The greatest beneficiary of diminished US engagement and influence is China. China is actively implementing a specific set of policies, programs, and investments to expand its influence throughout the Pacific specifically focusing on the fisheries sector, recognizing that the Pacific Island States see their development aspirations tied as closely to the fisheries sector as the Middle East is to oil. If the United States is to effectively stem China's rise as a regional power across the Pacific, it must develop a more holistic, high-level strategy to reinforce and reinvigorate the US posture in the Pacific, using fisheries as the influential conduit. Such a strategy requires coordination across multiple federal departments and agencies, including the Departments of State, Interior, Commerce, Defense, and Homeland Security.

I. Overview of Competing Interests in the Pacific

In post-war years, the United States maintained a strategic geopolitical position among Pacific nations, much of which was brought about through foreign assistance and economic development in Pacific Islands. This strategic position helped advance the mutual interests between the US and those of Pacific Islands and Oceania nations, particularly with respect to national security which extended to fishery interests. Many of these Pacific Islands where the US had physical presence included its overseas possessions – which were to become US Territories (American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, CNMI) and the Freely Associated States (Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Palau). Since the Compact of Free Association in 1986, the United States has provided economic assistance through trust funds, defense, and other services or benefits to Freely Associated States (approximately $270 million in 2020 obligations[1]). The Freely Associated States prove to be critical in negotiating fishery policy in the Pacific, as discussed in following sections. The United States also contributes foreign aid elsewhere throughout the Pacific, such as $2 billion of its global $51 billion 2020 aid obligations to be disbursed throughout Oceania and East Asia[1].

While the US maintains a pivotal role with respect to foreign aid distribution and global security, the US seldom has its fishery interests supported the Pacific, which should serve as a litmus test for how the US is unable to advance its interests in the Pacific in a time when it needs to counter the influence of competing countries. Such an interest includes having a US catch limit for bigeye tuna commensurate with current capacity. Advancement of US fisheries interests in the Pacific are often stymied through disagreements with beneficiaries of US aid. US fisheries also operate with inherent disadvantage relative to other competing nations, most of which are also industrialized and are vying for influence in the Pacific. Many of these competing fishing nations rely significantly on subsidies, much of which are deemed 'harmful' towards sustainability which include capacity enhancing or fuel subsidies, whereas the majority of US fisheries subsidies were deemed 'beneficial' because they enhance conservation, research, and management[2]. 55% of global fishery subsidies originate from Asia, including China which invested the greatest amount in fishery subsidies - $7.3 billion in 2018, of which 91-95% are deemed 'harmful'[1]. This contrast may be apparent whereas the registry and fishery participation of Chinese flagged tuna vessels in the Pacific has increased dramatically over the last two decades[3]. The World Trade Organization vowed to move towards reducing harmful fisheries subsidies; however progress on this front has been delayed as of November 2021 with draft negotiation text still in circulation[4].

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[1] USAID Foreign Assistance Data Dashboard, https://foreignassistance.gov/

[2] Sumaila, U.R., N. Ebrahim, A. Schuhbauer, D. Skerritt, Y. Li, H. S. Kim, T. G. Mallory, V.W.L. Lam, D. Pauly. (2019). Updated estimates and analysis of global fisheries subsidies. Marine Policy, Vol. 109

[3] *Attachment* - Informational Paper: The Rise of China in Pacific Tuna Fisheries

[4] Godfrey, M. "WTO fishing subsidies agreement draft text sent to trade ministers, raising hopes of deal" *Seafood Source* November 29, 2021

China has contributed an unknown portion of its global 2020 contribution of $4.8 billion in foreign aid to the Pacific region - to countries such as Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, and others that are supported by the United States as well. Policy analysts warn that much of this aid, as part of China's *Belt and Road Initiative*, could lead to 'debt-trap diplomacy' – a practice of issuing monetary or infrastructure assets in another country that cannot be reciprocated or repaid, thus creating leverage on that nation out of repercussion of having those assets seized. China's presence in the Pacific challenges the posture of US (and of other nations) influence. Such a presence and revisionist approaches to erode alliances and partnerships have been noted by the US Navy and the *Tri-Service Maritime Strategy* as detrimental to US naval advantages and potentially degrading to free and open international order[5]. Recently in Kiribati and the Solomon Islands, China supplanted Taiwanese influence, restored, and strengthened diplomatic relations. In Kiribati, China drafted plans to develop a large airstrip and infrastructure that could be used for military purposes, which is of concern for US national security. Chinese influence for fishing access in Kiribati is purported to have driven a decision towards opening the world's second largest marine protected area – the Phoenix Island Protected Area – adjacent to the EEZs of US Pacific Remote Island Areas (PRIAS).

Other Asian distant water fishing nations or entities (ADWFN), such as Korea, Japan, and Taiwan compete with the US through foreign aid, much of which is intended to influence fisheries specifically. For example, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that Japan had provided $172 million in grants to Federated States of Micronesia and $233 million to Palau from 1980 to 2016, plus numerous other contributions and infrastructure projects to Pacific Island nations. The Japan Trust Fund and the Chinese Taipei Trust Fund contribute significant funds for fisheries development within the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC)[6]. Aid by ADWFN may be conditional on support for donor nations' fisheries in international fora and negotiations. Fisheries are the economic common denominator and the largest shared commodity among all communities in the Pacific, including the ADWFN and the US alike.

II. Overview of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

Roughly 60% of the world's tuna supply, including the majority of US-caught tuna, is under international management of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), a regional fishery management organization (RFMO) that includes waters under US jurisdictions around Hawaii and the US Pacific Territories. The WCPFC was established by the international treaty, Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. The treaty was ratified in June 2004, based off the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement. The WCPFC serves the purpose *to ensure, through effective management, the long-term conservation and sustainable use of highly migratory fish*

[5] US Navy. 2020. "Advantage at Sea Prevailing with Integrated All-Domain Naval Power."
[6] https://www.wcpfc.int/implementation-article-30-convention

stocks in the western and central Pacific. This is achieved through a consensus-based approach to adopt resolutions and conservation and management measures (CMMs) for which members agree to abide.

The WCPFC, like other tuna RFMOs, assesses and reviews stocks through a scientific committee on an annual basis. The major tuna RFMOs manage the principal species which include tropical tunas (yellowfin tuna, bigeye tuna, skipjack tuna) and albacore stocks. The WCPFC is the only tuna RFMO for whereas these species are not overfished nor experiencing overfishing (Figure 1).

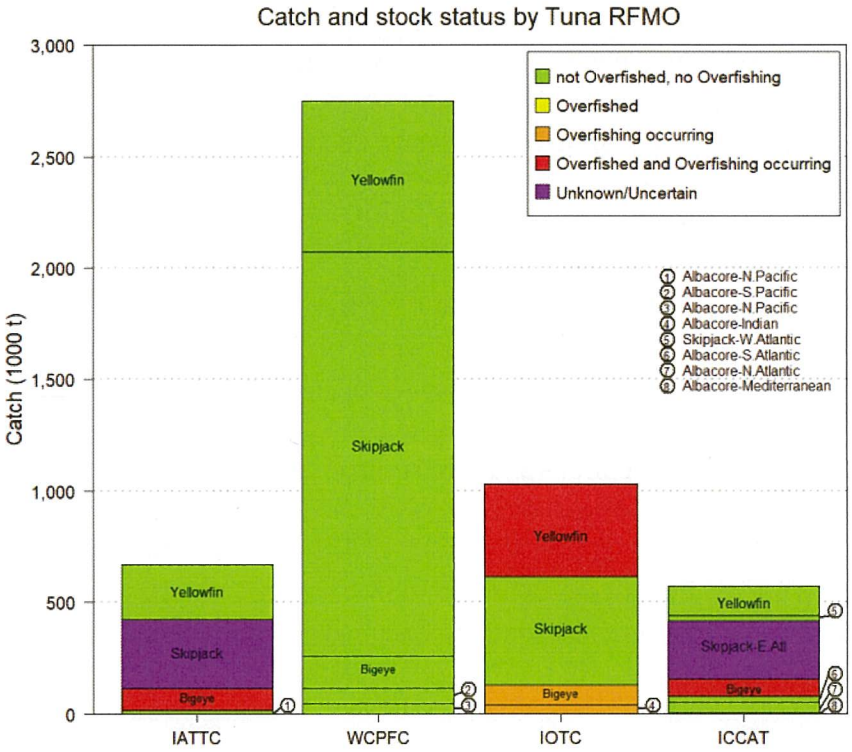

Figure 1 – Comparison of catch volume and stock status between the WCPFC and other RFMOs: International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)[7].

Conservation and management is to be consistent with Articles of the WCPFC Convention Text, which include objectives and guidelines from incorporating principles related to best available science, precautionary approach, governance, WCPFC functions, compliance, enforcement, monitoring, cooperation with other organizations, and other guidelines. One of the most important and unique considerations of conservation and management within the WCPFC is the recognition of special requirements of small island developing states (SIDS) through reducing or preventing 'disproportionate burdens' that may affect them. SIDS may have inherent

[7] Hare, et al. 2020. The western and central Pacific tuna fishery: 2019 overview and status of stocks. SPC Ocean Fisheries Programme. Noumea, New Caledonia, 2020.

economic and political disadvantages relative to larger nations such as the US, Australia, New Zealand, or ADWFN; and SIDS may be more reliant on its marine resources within their jurisdictions (inside their respective EEZs). WCPFC members are to be cognizant that shared fishery resources managed under the WCPFC are highly migratory, and thus these resources move among and outside national jurisdictions, often into the high seas where SIDS may not have the capacity to access them. The US Participating Territories are also entitled to the same considerations and privileges as SIDS. American Samoa also has a special consideration the WCPFC must consider, in that it does not have direct high seas access from its own EEZ. There are salient concerns among WCPFC members that non-compliance to CCMs and threats from illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fisheries on the high seas disproportionately impact SIDS and Participating Territories. Cooperation with developing states, such as the SIDS, to combat IUU fisheries, promote safety at sea, and strengthen compliance are notable priorities of the US Coast Guard in its 2021 implementation plan[8].

While the US has its own delegation to the WCPFC, each US Participating Territory is also recognized participant to the Commission, such that they may have their own delegation and thus attend and speak at Commission meetings on their own behalf. Having separate delegations consisting of the US and the three US Participating Territories also underscores the importance of the territories in negotiating mutual interests in the WCPFC and the need for US federal agencies work closely and in coordination with the US Participating Territories, particularly with improving relations with Pacific Island nations that may share cultural and economic commonalities.

III. US Pacific Tuna Fisheries Operating in WCPO and their Hardships

US Pacific Tuna Fisheries in the WCPO include the Hawaii-based longline fishery, the American Samoa longline fishery, and the US purse seine fishery. The Hawaii longline fishery is a limited-entry two-sector fishery (capped at 164 vessels) that targets bigeye tuna and swordfish, operating predominantly on the high seas around the Hawaiian archipelago. The American Samoa longline fishery targets albacore, but fishes exclusively in the US EEZ around American Samoa. Both the Hawaii and the American Samoa fisheries operate using vessels less than half the size of competing foreign longline vessels with fewer crew, do not transship, and far exceed all mandatory observer coverage requirements[9]. Many regard the Hawaii and American Samoa longline fisheries as the gold standard with respect to compliance and monitoring within the WCPFC. The US purse seine fishery operates almost exclusively in waters between 10°S and 10°N, targeting skipjack tuna that supplies canneries in American Samoa and throughout the Pacific.

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[8] US Coast Guard. 2021. "Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing Strategic Outlook and Implementation Plan".
[9] *Attachment*- Uneven Playing Field for U.S. Longline Fleet within the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO)

Hawaii Longline Fishery

The Hawaii longline fishery is recognized as a 'fresh fish' fishery, in that it packs bigeye tuna on ice for the purpose of consumption as poke and sashimi to supply the US market and Hawaii locally. The fishery is the most important domestically managed tuna fishery in the United States, supplying nearly 60% of the ex-vessel revenue of US-landed tuna fisheries, excluding canned tuna, and is the leading domestic US supplier of swordfish. The fishery contributes over $105 million annually[10] in ex-vessel dockside revenue to Hawaii alone and is a significant component to the Hawaii economy, local culture, and food security. The Hawaii longline fishery has additional value in supporting thousands of jobs and supplying the local restaurant industry and vast tourism industry.

Despite the national importance that the Hawaii fishery has in the geopolitical footprint of the US in the Pacific, the US has been unable to negotiate a fair US longline catch limit for bigeye tuna that is representative of fleet capacity, historical production, and demand. At present the US has a longline bigeye tuna catch limit of 3,554 mt, which is the lowest catch limit for six countries with specified catch limits[11,12].

At the 18th Regular Session of the WCPFC (WCPFC18) in December 2021, the US proposed increasing the US longline bigeye tuna catch limit by 3,000 mt, based on the rationale that a significant portion of catch remains unutilized by other members and such an increase would not undermine conservations objectives. The WCPFC Science Committee noted that the 'temperate region', which includes the region where the Hawaii fishery exclusively operates has some of the lowest levels of regional depletion and offered scientific advice with the goal to increase bigeye fishery yields but reduce any further impacts on the spawning biomass in the tropical regions[13]. The delegations of the US and US Participating Territories also submitted analyses further demonstrating that increases in US fishing privileges do not create disproportionate burdens for SIDS and may have positive benefits for SIDS and Participating Territories[14]. Despite scientific support and demonstrable evidence that an increase of US longline bigeye tuna catch would pose no conservation risk or hardship to other members, the US was rebuked and was placed into a defense posture at WCPFC18. As a result, the US is to retain its catch limit through 2023.

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[10] Data from: WPRFMC Stock Assessment and Evaluation Reports https://www.wpcouncil.org/annual-reports/

[11] *Attachment*- Annual Western and Central Pacific Bigeye Tuna Longline Catch Limits Adopted by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

[12] WCPFC CMM 2021-01 Conservation and Management Measure for bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean

[13] WCPO Bigeye Tuna Stock Status and Management Advice, https://www.wcpfc.int/doc/01/bigeye-tuna

[14] Assessments under CMM 2013-06 for Proposed and Potential Provisions of a New Conservation and Management Measure for the Tropical Tuna Stocks, 18th Regular Session of WCPFC, WCPFC18-2021-TTM-DP09

American Samoa Longline Fishery

The American Samoa longline fishery has declined in participation and fishery performance since 2007, declining from over 5,000 mt catch to under 1,200 mt in 2020[10]. In 2007, the ratio of Chinese to US catch South Pacific albacore was approximately 1:1. Since that time, Chinese catches of South Pacific albacore are over 20 times that of the US. In 2018, the WCPFC adopted an interim target reference point to increase biomass with the goal to increase biomass and resulting catch-per-unit effort (CPUE). WCPFC members have suggested a reduction in fishing effort in the South Pacific targeting the stock, noting that the stock has gradually declined and CPUE has declined even greater. Despite all of this, the stock is not overfished, nor experiencing overfishing. However, regional depletion in waters around American Samoa is the highest in a region comprised mostly of EEZs of Pacific Island States[15]. There is little to no chance of an interim target reference point for the stock being reached under status quo levels of catch and effort[15]. Therefore, there was a need for WCPFC18 to possibly revise the CMM 2015-02 for South Pacific albacore to encompass the entire stock distribution and develop harvest strategies. Unfortunately, the WCPFC18 made no progress on reducing catches towards a biomass target and instead was fixated on reducing catches on the high seas, while substantive level of catches are extracted from areas inside EEZs around American Samoa. Meanwhile, fishery performance and profitability for the American Samoa fishery continues to decline due to increasing disproportionate burden, despite being entitled to special consideration as a SIDS.

US Purse Seine Fishery

From 2018-2020 the US purse seine fishery caught and landed an annual average of 202,415 mt of tuna, of which on average of 78,879 was offloaded in American Samoa[16] to supply the local StarKist cannery in Pago Pago. Viability of the only remaining cannery is existential for the American Samoa economy and directly tied to the success of all American Samoa fisheries – including the American Samoa longline fishery. GDP of American Samoa dropped 18.2% from 2007 to 2019[17], following closure of a cannery in Pago Pago. The remaining StarKist cannery needs assurance of product supply to maintain business. US purse seiners have been offloading on average of 39% of catch among all US-flagged vessels in Pago Pago from 2016-2020[13]. From 2005-2007, 76% of those vessels were offloading in Pago Pago[13]. While total tonnage has been relatively consistent, there is room to expand and increase the amount of product from US vessels offloading in Pago Pago as the amount of fish from US vessels offloading in foreign ports has increased.

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[15] Reference Document for South Pacific Albacore for the Review of CMM 2015-02 and Development of Harvest Strategies under CMM 2014-06, 18th Regular Session of WCPFC, WCPFC18-2021-18

[16] Data provided by NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office, Honolulu, HI

[17] Government Accountability Office, https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-467

However, from 2018 to 2021, the US purse seine fleet declined from 34 vessels to 13 vessels, considerably lower than the peak of US purse seine operations with 60 vessels in previous decades. Many of these vessels re-flagged from the US to avoid perceived stringent restrictions on allowable fishing effort on the high seas, access fees for US vessels under the South Pacific Tuna Treaty, and FAD closures. At WCPFC18, the US proposed recognizing US-flagged purse seine vessels that operate out of American Samoa as being eligible to benefits of SIDS. The idea was rebuffed and no progress was made to recognize these vessels.

The inability for the US to progress and advance its interests in the WCPFC will undoubtedly have negative consequences – not only on the economies of Hawaii and the US Pacific Territories, but also for conservation and management of marine resources. When US fisheries cannot contribute adequately to meet demands, they supplanted by foreign fisheries that do not have regulatory equivalencies to the Magnuson-Stevens Act, Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, National Environmental Protection Act, and other applicable laws to that US fisheries are beholden to. Supplanting US fisheries would likely lead to higher catches of sea turtles, mammals, birds, sharks, and other species in loosely regulated foreign fisheries. These fisheries are often not as well monitored and do not have the level of monitoring and surveillance as US fisheries. Diminishing the relevance of US fisheries in the Pacific also diminishes the political capital of the US to advance conservation and management measures that benefit marine life.

IV. Dynamic Political Landscape in the WCPFC

The WCPFC political landscape is driven by blocs of likeminded participating members, either linked by geographical, cultural, or economic commonalities. The US is often dismissed by delegations at the WCPFC, likely due to animus towards the US that may be residual from unrelated or past disagreements. With Pacific Islands, the animus is likely predicated on the notion that the interests of Pacific Islands are counter to those of the US and the lack of progress (or perceived willingness) by the US to find common ground with those nations. In contrast, ADWFN, despite cultural or political differences, tend to find themselves in mutual agreement among one another with respect to conservation and management negotiations.

Most Pacific Island nations are generally unified by their membership to the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA). FFA members generally support interventions and negotiations by other FFA members. Eight Pacific Island nations comprise the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA), which have specific interests regarding fishery management in the highly productive waters around the Equator.

To ameliorate any perceived or substantiated disproportionate burdens for SIDS in negotiating conservation and management, the FFA and PNA often promote a rationale to balance fishing effort and/or catch between waters within SIDS jurisdiction and waters on the high seas. Presumably, WCPFC members would utilize high seas waters or within their own

jurisdiction at no access cost, but would access another nation's jurisdiction (such SIDS) at an associated cost. This rationale is referred to as 'zone based management'. US fisheries do not have access to most of the US EEZs in the WCPFC Convention areas due to establishment of Marine National Monuments and other closures, hence access to the high seas is important for the US. Zone based management is integrated in the WCPFC tropical tunas CMM through implementation of a vessel day scheme (VDS). Within the VDS, WCPFC members are limited to purse seine effort on the high seas, balanced with effort limits within member EEZs. WCPFC members are also subjected to seasonal restrictions on the use of fish aggregating devices (FADS) on the high seas and within EEZs. SIDS may declare registered vessels exempt from seasonal FAD closures on an annual basis.

This privilege of FAD exemptions for SIDS often comes with debate at the WCPFC, out of concern that these exemptions undermine conservation precaution for bigeye tuna without due diligence of scientific review or may be misused by partnering distant water nations. In 2020, nearly one third of purse seine vessels in the WCPFC had declared exemptions from FAD closures, including 14 Chinese-flagged purse seiners operating through agreements with Kiribati[18]. Meanwhile, US-flagged purse seiners are subjected to FAD closures, effort limits on the high seas, and may not have incentive to remain in the WCPFC Convention Area through the year in order to supply the American Samoa cannery.

Freely Associated States comprise three of the eight members of the PNA, which render the opportunity for the US and US Participating Territories to work towards mutual goals with these nations through the Compact of Free Association (COFA) and the Micronesia Island Forum. Through COFA, the US contributed ~$170 million in 2019 to Free Associated States within a twenty year trust fund of $3.5 billion. While the US does not presently identify closely with any group of WCPFC members, which can make it difficult to garner support or open dialogues that could be beneficial, Guam and CNMI are members of the Micronesia Island Forum. External to the WCPFC, the Micronesia Island Forum is an organization *which plans for, and enhances, the quality of life throughout its member states while preserving each states diverse culture.* Improving the relationship with the Freely Associated States can be critical to improving the positions of the US and the US Participating Territories and may reduce the overall animus towards the US.

V. A Path Forward and Need for a Strategic Plan

The diminishing role of US fisheries in the Pacific can have dire consequences on US food production for the Pacific Islands and local economies. This may be indicative of waning US geopolitical influence in the region, while the present is a point in time that strengthening US positions within the Pacific is critical to countering the influences of global competitors such as China. Congressional members have demonstrated interest on this issue with proposed

[18] WCPFC Circular 2020/08, 3 August 2020: Notifications Relevant to Footnote1 of CMM 2018-01

legislation referred to House Foreign Affairs[19] and Senate Foreign Relations[20] Committees. The US Navy, US Coast Guard, and the Tri-Services Maritime Strategy identify threats to US influence and its sustained national security advantages[5,8] that could very well be resulting in part to inaction of US agencies to advance US fisheries in international fora. A more holistic, high-level strategy is needed to strengthen US interests in the Pacific, using fisheries as the influential conduit. Such a strategy requires coordination across multiple federal departments and agencies, including the Departments of State, Interior, Commerce, Defense, and Homeland Security.

A task force consisting of representatives from agencies within these federal departments need to design a roadmap for calculated actions each agency must take within a timeline in the next two years consistent with the current Administration. This task force may need to plan workshops and in-country visits. For example, Council had requested NOAA-NMFS to develop a workshop on zone-based longline management for WCPFC fisheries with cooperation with the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency. This task force could glean steps needed to assuage any disagreement or unrelated issues taken by Pacific Island countries. This may require numerous meetings of US Pacific Island stakeholders with decision makers in Washington DC. The end result must lead to increased US agency integration in the Pacific which will improve the US posture in the Pacific so it may achieve its goals for increased economic development, food security, and national security.

[19] H.R.2967 - BLUE Pacific Act. Introduced May 4, 2021 to the 117th Congress, 2021-2022.
[20] S.1774 - Honoring OCEANIA Act. Introduced May 20, 2021 to the 117th Congress, 2021-2022.

Informational Paper: The Rise of China in Pacific Tuna Fisheries

February 2017

I. Introduction[1]

China has experienced substantial growth of its fishing industry since the late 1970s with catches increasing from about 5 million tons to over 60 million tons. Historically, China's marine fisheries production was eclipsed by freshwater fisheries production and disrupted by political events such as the mid-1960s Cultural Revolution. In 2013, China's total fishery production reached 61.7 million tons, representing over one-third of the world's total fishery production. China's enormous fishing industry is supported by the world's largest fishing fleet, with nearly 200,000 marine (sea-going) fishing vessels and 2,460 distant-water (i.e., fishing on the high seas beyond China's EEZ) fishing vessels that fish on the high seas beyond China's EEZ.

Apart from being the biggest fishery producer, China has also been being the world's leading exporter of fishery products since 2002. In 2013, China grossed USD 11.6 billion surplus from its external fishery trade.

II. China's Tuna Fisheries in the Pacific Ocean

Since 2000, there has been rapid growth in Chinese longline and purse seine fisheries operating in the Pacific Ocean targeting tuna.

Longline Fisheries

Chinese longline vessels target bigeye, yellowfin, and albacore tuna, and operate in both the high seas and national waters of Pacific Island countries. Significant increases in both number of vessels and catch have been observed since 2000 (Figures 1). In 2015, 429 Chinese-flagged longline vessels operated in the Western & Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO), catching over 35,000 mt of tuna and billfish. A significant component of the Chinese longline fleet is capable of landing ice-chilled and super-frozen tuna for various markets including sashimi (e.g. bigeye) and cannery (e.g. albacore). Chinese large scale longline vessels also operate in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO), with observed increased catches since 2000 (Figure 3).

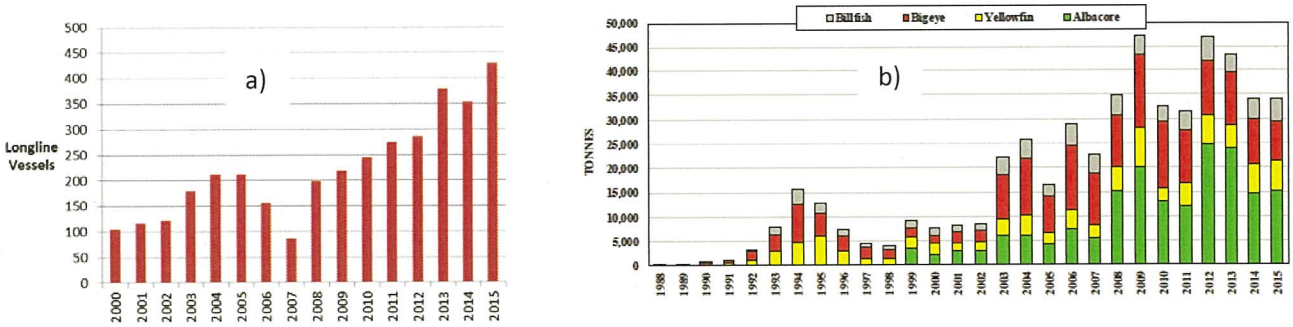

Figure 1: a) Number of active Chinese-flagged longline vessels operating in the WCPO; b) WCPO catch of tuna by Chinese longline vessels
Source: WCPFC 2016.

[1] This introductory section on China and its fisheries is freely adapted from a paper by Zhang Hongzhou (2015).

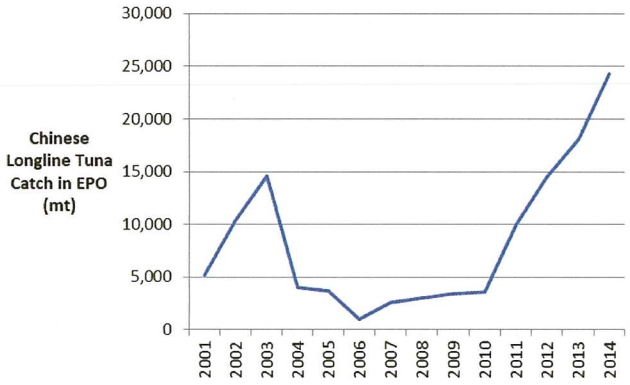

Figure 2: EPO catch of tuna by Chinese-flagged longline vessels
Source: IATTC 2015.

Purse seine Fisheries

China has a growing purse seine fishery. In 2000, there were no Chinese flagged seiners operating in the WCPO, now there are 20. The WCPO catch of Chinese-flagged purse seine vessels in 2015 was 43, 236 metric tons. China's emergence in purse seine fishing has been coupled with significant investments in onshore processing facilities under development in Papua New Guinea, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Marshall Islands, and Kiribati. Onshore investments are typically coupled to fishing access agreements to the EEZs of certain Pacific Island countries.

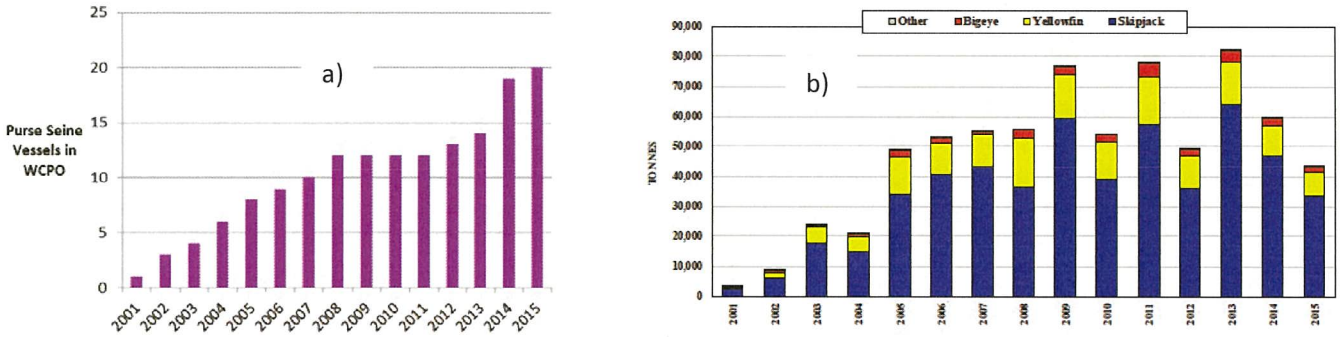

Figure 3: a) Number of Chinese-flagged purse vessels operating in the WCPO; b) WCPO catch of tuna by Chinese purse seine vessels
Source: WCPFC 2016.

III. Chinese Government Subsidies[2]

China subsidizes its distant water tuna fleets to levels unmatched globally. In its 11th five-year plan (2006-2011), China's central government's 'going global' strategy was emphasized, as it announced that it intended to actively support domestic enterprises abroad. Part of this strategy includes a set of incentives and subsidies to continue expanding its distant water fleet. These include subsidies on fuel, vessel construction, preferential tax treatment and payment for access to other nation's EEZs (Table 1).

[2] The following section on China's subsidies for its fishing industry is freely adapted from paper by J. Ilakini and R. Imo of the Forum Fisheries Agency (2014).

Table 1: Tax incentives and Direct Subsidies by the Chinese government to its distant water fleets

Tax Incentives	Direct subsidies to the fishing industry
• Corporate tax relief • Tax incentives to shipyards • Tariff cuts on imported equipment • Accelerated depreciation	• Fishery research, development and exploration and technology transfer • Fuel offsets • Access fees • Favorable industry loan rates

Source: Ilakini and Imo 2014.

The extent and magnitude of the subsidies and other support given by the Chinese government to its DWF sector is significant and likely to provide the Chinese DWF with significant cost advantage over unsubsidized fleets. The extent of Chinese subsidies and tax incentives appears to be growing under each five-year plan. Operators of other fleets operating in the WCPO longline fishery feel that they may soon be rendered economically unviable due to their cost disadvantage.

IV. Influence in Western and Central Pacific

It is no coincidence that China's rapid growth in fisheries also coincided with its growing influence in Oceania. Since the early 2000s, China has been an aggressive player in Oceania in search of natural gas, minerals, fish, and other raw materials. China provides hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign aid to governments of Pacific small island developing states. In many cases, the aid includes infrastructure projects, which are constructed by Chinese firms employing non-local Chinese workers. There are numerous articles that describe China's increased interest in Oceania and its mounting influence over Pacific Island countries. See the following reference list for further reading.

V. Competition with US fisheries

Chinese longline vessels are supplying the same US markets that are supplied by US longline fleets operating out of Hawaii and American Samoa. Chinese vessels are also competing for fish on the same fishing grounds, often fishing side by side with Hawaii longline vessels on the high seas adjacent to the US EEZ around Hawaii.

VI. Conclusion

China's rapid growth in Pacific tuna fisheries since 2000 has served to overcapitalize fisheries and has led to stock declines in bigeye and albacore fisheries. Significant government subsidies for Chinese vessels lessen the impact of reduced catch rates, which allow Chinese vessels to outcompete fleets of other nations including the United States. The expansion of China into Pacific tuna fishing is undermining US influence in the region, and exacerbating our seafood trade deficit through the influx of Chinese caught tuna supplied to US markets.

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Uneven Playing Field for U.S. Longline Fleet within the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO)

Issues	US Fleets	Competing Foreign Fleets
WCPO Bigeye Tuna Longline Catch Limits in metric tons (mt)[1]	3,554 mt (lowest of nations with specified limits)	Japan: 17,765 mt; Korea: 13,942 mt; Chinese Taipei: 10,481 mt; China: 8,724 mt; Indonesia: 5,889 mt; Small Island Developing States: no limits
Longline Fleet Size and Capacity Limits in WCPFC (September 2020)[2]	Hawaii-based:145 longliners active, capped at 164 American Samoa-9 active, capped at 60	Japan: 420; Korea: 118; Chinese Taipei: 618; China: 506; Indonesia: 0.
WCPO Average Longline Vessel Size (Tonnage, mt)[2]	82 mt	Japan: 182 mt; Korea: 410 mt; Chinese Taipei: 127 mt; China: 384 mt; Vanuatu: 454 mt; Average International Vessel: 221 mt
WCPO Average Longline Vessel Crew Size[2]	6 crew	Japan: 15; Korea: 25; Chinese Taipei: 15; China: 19; Vanuatu: 24; Average International Vessel: 16 crew
National Fishery Subsidies[3] ('Beneficial' subsidies in parentheses). Values in USD[3]	$3.4B ($2.2B in "beneficial" subsidies); $21M/yr Tuna Treaty,	China: $7.3B ($434M); EU: $3.8B ($1.5B); Korea: $3.2B ($1.5B); Japan: $2.8B ($534M); Chinese Taipei: $787M ($69M). Chinese subsidies deemed to be 91-95% 'harmful'
Reported 2019 Longline Fishery Observer Coverage[5] (minimum requirement is 5% in international waters)	By effort (hooks fished): 18% By trip: 22.9% (deep-set), 100% (shallow-set)	By effort (hooks fished): China:2.1%; Japan: 2.7%; Korea: 3%; Chinese Taipei: 7.4%; Indonesia: 0% By days fished in international waters: China: 5.3%; Japan: 6%; Korea: 11%; Chinese Taipei: 5.5%, Indonesia: N/A
Reported 2019 WCPO Longline Transshipment Events[5]	None	China: 299, Japan: 249, Korea: 129, Chinese Taipei: 1,015
Reported 2019 WCPO Longline Transshipment of Bigeye Tuna (mt)[5]	None	China: 6,339 mt, Japan: 187 mt, Korea: 8,357 mt, Chinese Taipei: 7,646 mt
Import/Export of Tuna Products to/from United States in 2019 (in mt and USD)[6]	Export Tuna: 2,805mt, valued $13.3 M Export Bigeye tuna: 64 mt, $491K	Import Tuna: 282,777 mt, valued $1.875B China: 3,025 mt; Korea: 2,304 mt; Japan: 1,371 mt; Chinese Taipei: 1,555 mt; Indonesia: 30,674 mt; Thailand: 105,514 mt; Vietnam: 39,155 mt; Philippines: 13,017 mt Import Bigeye tuna: 4,974 mt, $35.5M

[1]WCPFC CMM-2018-01 Conservation and Management Measure for Tropical Tunas, Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), www.wpcfc.int

[2]WCPFC Record of Fishing Vessel Registry, September 2020, www.wcpfc.int

[3]Sumaila, U.R., N. Ebrahim, A. Schuhbauer, D. Skerritt, Y. Li, H. S. Kim, T. G. Mallory, V.W.L. Lam, D. Pauly. (2019). *Updated estimates and analysis of global fisheries subsidies.* Marine Policy, Vol. 109

[4]16th Regular Session of the WCPFC Compliance Monitoring Report, December 2019, www.wcpfc.int

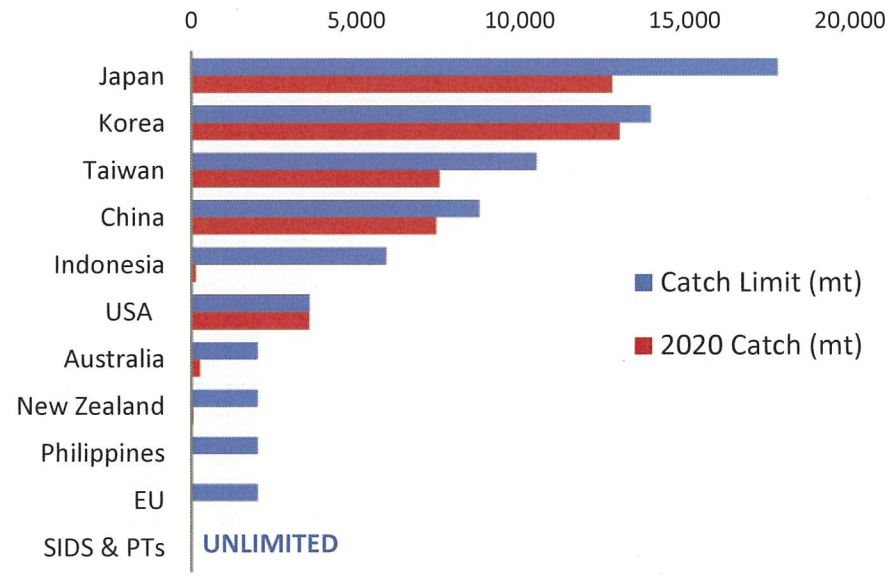
[5]16th Session of Technical and Compliance Committee of the WCPFC, September 2020, www.wcpfc.int

[6]NOAA Fisheries Foreign Fisheries Trade Data https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/sustainable-fisheries/foreign-fishery-trade-data

Annual Western and Central Pacific Bigeye Tuna Longline Catch Limits Adopted by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

Catch Limit Allocations Adopted in 2018 (renewed in 2020, 2021) expiring at the end of 2023

Member States	2020 Catch (mt)	Catch limit (mt)
Japan	12,791	17,765
Korea	13,011	13,942
Chinese Taipei	7,519	10,481
China	7,416	8,724
Indonesia	122	5,889
USA	3,548	3,554
Australia	283	2000
New Zealand	50	2000
Philippines	0*	2000
European Union	30	2000
Small Island Developing States and Participating Territories	N/A	No Limit



WCPFC Members: Australia, China, Canada, Cook Islands, European Union, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, France, Indonesia, Japan, Kiribati, Republic of Korea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Chinese Taipei, Tonga, Tuvalu, United States of America, Vanuatu.
Participating Territories (PTs): American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Tokelau, Wallis and Futuna
Cooperating Non-member(s): Ecuador, El Salvador, Liberia, Mexico, Panama, Thailand, Vietnam.
SIDS: WCPFC Members deemed "small island developing states"

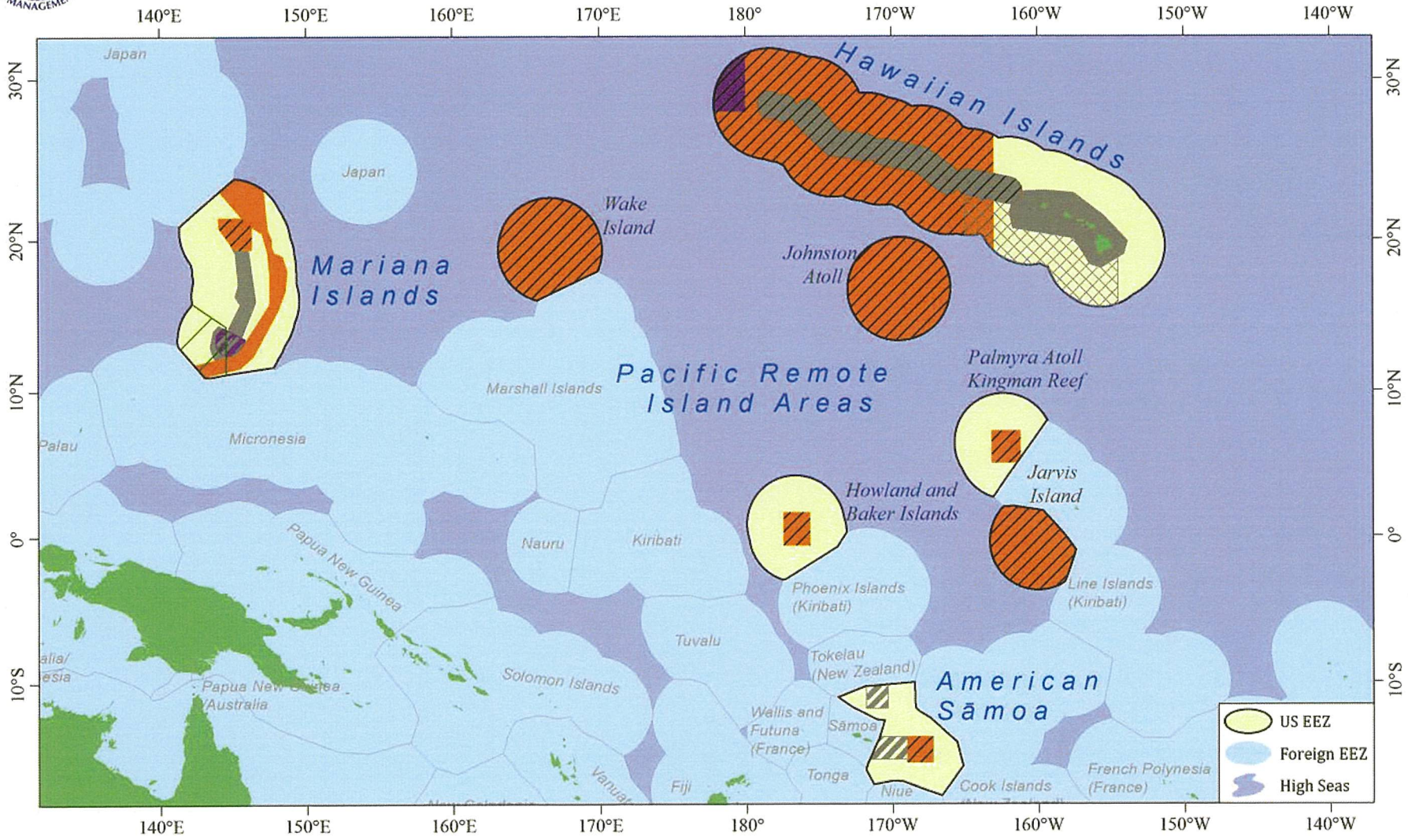
US EEZ Regulated Fishing Areas, Western Pacific Region

Magnuson-Stevens Act

- Longline fishing prohibited (1991 - 92, 2011)
- Large Vessel Prohibited Area (2002)
- False Killer Whale Southern Exclusion Zone (2012)
- Guam No Anchor Zone (2004)
- Bottomfish/Groundfish fishing prohibited (1986)
- Bottomfish Vessels ≥ 50 ft prohibited (2006)
- US EEZ: trawling, drift gillnets, poisons and explosives prohibited (1986 - 2004)

Antiquities Act

- Marine National Monument (2006 - 2016)
- Closed to all commercial fishing



WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Strengthening Fisheries Development for US Pacific Territories:

From Addressing Local Issues to the Pacific Landscape

1. Introduction and Background

This information paper provides three key components of information: (1) an overview of the underserved fishery-dependent economies of the three U.S. Pacific Territories of American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and Guam; (2) fishery development needs and aspirations; (3) importance of fisheries for the U.S. Pacific Territories in terms of food security and socioeconomic resiliency. The purpose of this information paper is to underscore the need to prioritize investment by federal agencies for fishery development in the three U.S. Pacific Territories that is consistent with recent legislation, mandates through Executive Orders, and the overarching geopolitical agenda of the U.S. Food security, economic development, social significance of fisheries to the underserved U.S. Pacific Island communities, and strengthening the U.S. Pacific Territories' relevance in the greater Pacific community are among the rationale for investing in fishery development.

While each of the U.S. Pacific Territories have local fisheries caught and managed within territorial and U.S. waters, tuna fisheries are the largest and most influential economic driver among the international Pacific Islands landscape as whole[1]. Tuna stocks around the three U.S. Pacific Territories are managed through the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). Within the WCPFC, the U.S. Pacific Territories are entitled to special rights and privileges afforded to small island development states (SIDS) and *Participating Territories* under Articles 30 and 43 of the WCPFC Convention Text. The aspirations for U.S. *Participating Territories* and their economic disadvantages are recognized internationally by the WCPFC.

Aspirations of the U.S. Pacific Territories, their fishery development needs, and prioritized projects are addressed through Marine Conservation Plans (MCP) for American Samoa[2], CNMI[3], and Guam[4]. These MCPs identify conservation and management objectives and prioritize marine conservation projects for the purpose of improving fishery monitoring, local capacity building, and ensuring food security for island communities through sustainable fisheries. The MCPs are developed by the Governor of each U.S. Pacific Territory and are applicable for three-year terms. Projects associated with these MCPs are almost exclusively funded through specified fishing agreements between Hawaii-based U.S. longline fishing vessels and each territory's government. U.S. domestic regulations[5] authorize specification of catch limits of longline-caught bigeye tuna for U.S. Participating Territories. Each U.S. Participating

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[1] WPRFMC. 2022. *Waning US Influence and Impacts to Major US Pacific Tuna Fisheries within the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO): A Call for a US Government Strategic Plan.* 17 pp.
[2] https://www.wpcouncil.org/fisheries/american-samoa-archipelago/
[3] https://www.wpcouncil.org/fisheries/northern-mariana-islands-mariana-archipelago/
[4] https://www.wpcouncil.org/fisheries/guam-mariana-archipelago/
[5] https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/chapter-VI/part-665/subpart-F/section-665.819

Territory may allocate a portion of that limit to U.S. longline fishing vessels based out of Hawaii through specified fishing agreements.

Guam and CNMI are members of the Micronesia Islands Forum (MIF)[6], which membership also includes each of the four states of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Palau. The goal of the MIF is to plan for and enhance the quality of life throughout its member states while preserving each state's diverse culture. The MIF is critical for bridging shared economic and social objectives, which may include fishery aspirations. In 2019, the MIF reaffirmed the commitment of each of the participants, on behalf of their people and their governments, to establish closer ties, strengthen cooperation, and agree on initiatives for the benefit of members and the entire Micronesian Region.

2. Contrasting Issues for American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam

2.1 American Samoa: A Local Tuna-Driven Island Economy

American Samoa has a population of nearly 50,000, 84% of which are Samoan and three percent of which are other Pacific Islanders.[7] American Samoa's culture is based around *Aiga* (family) and 54% of the population lives below the U.S. poverty line.[8] Tuna fishing and processing have long been an important part of American Samoa's economy, with offloading from longline vessels starting in the 1950s and offloading from purse seine vessels starting in 1970. The first cannery was built in 1949, and a second was constructed in 1963. Currently, one cannery operates in American Samoa. The economy is heavily dependent on the well-being of the tuna cannery and the American Samoa-based longline and purse seine fleets.

Total tuna exports are valued at about $353 million per year, with canned tuna making up 99.5% of the total value of exports[7]. Employment in the tuna industry represents over 80% of private employment in American Samoa, and the cannery provides jobs not only to citizens of American Samoa, but also to many nationals of other Pacific Island countries and territories, particularly Samoa, Niue, Tokelau, and Tonga. Port calls by longline and purse seine vessels are important for supplying fish for processing to the cannery, and also for supporting the local economy through purchases of fuel, supplies, and services. In 2017-2019, there were 247 purse seiner calls at Pago Pago, each representing about $400,000 in local purchases, averaging about $33 million per year. However, there has been a steep downturn in port calls since 2020[9] which corresponds to a recent decline in tuna offloading in American Samoa and associated economic losses affecting the local economy.

Tuna deliveries to Pago Pago by purse seiners averaged less than 100,000 mt each year in 2017-2019[8]. Almost 85% of the purse seine vessels offloading in American Samoa are from U.S. flagged vessels[8], and a reduction in the size of the U.S. fleet in recent years (40 vessels in 2015

[6] https://www.mifsecretariat.org/
[7] American Samoa Statistical Yearbook 2018 and 2019, American Samoa Department of Commerce
[8] GAO 20-467 https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-467
[9] American Samoa Port Administration

to 12 vessels in 2022) has resulted in a significant decline in landings to the cannery in American Samoa.

U.S. vessels have reflagged largely to other Pacific Islands nations. The reasons include economic conditions and regulatory requirements like the fish aggregating device closures and high seas fishing effort limits, which have made operating conditions less favorable. In addition, some vessels have shifted operations to the eastern Pacific. As result, cannery employment in 2021 had declined by 30 percent, and the reduction in port calls to American Samoa is estimated to have resulted in an economic loss of $56 million annually to American Samoa. Loss of the tuna industry would increase energy and freight costs in American Samoa by about 30 percent.[10]

American Samoa also has a longline fleet that primarily targets albacore and catches other pelagic species such as yellowfin and skipjack. This fleet operates within the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and occasionally also fishes on the high seas. In 2020 and 2021, 11 longline vessels fished, and participation in this fleet has been declining over time due to lack of profitability associated with low catch rates. American Samoa also has a small-scale troll fleet that fishes entirely within the portion of the U.S. EEZ around American Samoa, primarily for skipjack and yellowfin tuna and several local bottomfish fisheries.

MCP objectives for American Samoa include: (1) Maximize social and economic benefits through sustainable fisheries; (2) Support quality scientific research to assess and manage fisheries; (3) Promote an ecosystem approach in fisheries management; (4) Recognize the importance of island culture and traditional fishing in managing fishery resources and foster opportunities for participation; (5) Promote education and outreach activities and regional collaboration regarding fisheries conservation; and (6) Encourage development of technologies and methods to achieve the most effective level of enforcement and to ensure safety at sea. The American Samoa MCP includes specific projects for the construction of docks and boat ramps, the construction of a fishery co-op with ice machines in the remote outer islands like Manu'a. Through an MCP-supported project, some vessels in the local longline fleet have begun diversifying their operations to trolling methods for albacore on the high seas to increase revenue opportunities during the 'low season' for fishing within the U.S. EEZ around American Samoa.

2.2 Mariana Archipelago: Driven by Military and Tourism, with Asian Influence

2.2(A) *Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands*

The CNMI has a population of almost 54,000, and its main industries are tourism-related. Over fifty percent (~52.3%) of CNMI residents live below the U.S. poverty line. Citizens of Freely Associated States (FAS) under the Compact of Free Association with the U.S. which include the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Palau, comprise 5% of the CNMI population. CNMI reported $9.8 million (USD) in expenditures associated with FAS citizens[11]. The 2016 unemployment rate of CNMI was 14% – nearly four times greater than that of the U.S. (4.7%) and Palau (4.2%, 2005 estimate), but was lower than unemployment rates in

[10] Estimate by American Samoa Chamber of Commerce
[11] GAO 20-491 https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-491

the other FAS[12]. Approximately 10,000 to 22,000 temporary workers from neighboring Asian and Oceania nations, including 2,535 workers from FAS[17], sought employment in CNMI from 2011 to 2017, many of which were engaged in fishing or fishing related industries[18].

Historically, U.S. purse seine vessels transshipped while longline vessels were based in CNMI, but currently troll vessels are the only commercial fishing operators for pelagic fish in CNMI, and they primarily target skipjack and yellowfin. CNMI has significant fisheries development potential and aspirations as described in its MCP[2]. MCP objectives for CNMI include: (1) Improve fisheries data collection and reporting; (2) Conduct Resource assessment, monitoring, and research to gain a better understanding of marine resources and fisheries; (3) Conduct enforcement training and monitoring activities to promote compliance with federal and local mandates; (4) Promote responsible domestic fisheries development to provide long term economic growth and stability and local food production; (5) Conduct Education and Outreach, enhance public participation, and build local capacity; (6) Promote Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management, Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation, and Regional Cooperation; and (7) Recognize the importance of island cultures and traditional fishing practices in managing fishery resources and foster opportunities for participation.

The U.S. EEZ around CNMI and Guam collectively span over 12 latitudinal degrees, encompassing regions with relatively low depletion for skipjack[13] and bigeye tuna[14], which underscore potential for viable sustainable fisheries. In addition to the fishing grounds adjacent to the emergent islands, a western chain of seamounts runs the length of the Mariana Archipelago. This seamount chain likely provides upwelling of nutrients that support a range of commercially important bottomfish and pelagic species[15]. CNMI's local tourism market coupled with its close proximity to Guam and large Asian markets make responsible fisheries development a key area for economic growth. Significant foreign investment is currently occurring in Saipan with the development of several new hotels and gambling centers marketed towards Asian clientele. In order to meet local demand, CNMI bottomfish and pelagic fisheries require development. CNMI fisheries development needs to include longline vessel capacity, large vessel docking space, fish processing and cold storage facilities, and training in fish handling and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point protocols.

2.2(B) *Guam*

Guam is the southernmost island in the Mariana Archipelago and has a population of almost 169,000, of which 22.4% live below the U.S. poverty line. Thirty-seven percent of Guam residents are indigenous Chamoru, 33% are Asian (including Filipinos, Koreans, Chinese, and Japanese), while 11% of the population are among ethnic groups originating from the FAS.

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[12] Ayers, A. L. 2018. The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Fishing Community Profile: 2017 Update. NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-PIFSC-66 57 p

[13] Vincent, M., Pilling, G., and J Hampton. 2019. Stock assessment of skipjack tuna in the WCPO. 15th Regular Session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee, Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia.

[14] Ducharme-Barth, N., M. Vincent, J. Hampton, P. Hamer, P. Williams, and G. Pilling. 2020. Stock assessment of bigeye tuna in the western and central Pacific Ocean. 16th Regular Session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee, Virtual Meeting. SC16-SA-WP-03.

[15] WPRFMC. 2009. Fishery Ecosystem Plan for the Mariana Archipelago. 251 pp.

Guam reported $147 million in costs associated with providing public services to FAS migrants in 2017 for a total of $1.2 billion estimated costs from 2004 - 2017[17]. The fishing community in Guam is comprised of at least 17% individuals from FAS nations and 7% Filipino.[16] The main industries of Guam are tourism and the military, while fisheries remain an important component to food security and culture.

Historically, U.S. purse seine and longline vessels were based out of Guam, but currently troll vessels are the only commercial fishing operators for pelagic fish primarily targeting skipjack and yellowfin tuna. Transshipment of fish from foreign vessels also occurred in Guam, but transshipments have not occurred in some time.

Due to Guam's tourism and military economy and diverse spectrum of resident ethnicities, local demand for seafood is high. Guam's excellent harbor facilities and local infrastructure could support local fisheries development. Existing challenges include a relatively small EEZ around Guam and the lack of fisheries training programs. Reducing limitations to fishery development are highlighted in Guam's MCP[3], which state the following priorities, in order to improve: (1) Fisheries Resource Assessment, Research, and Monitoring; (2) Effective Surveillance and Enforcement Mechanisms; (3) Promote Ecosystems Approach to Fisheries Management, Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation, and Regional Cooperation; (4) Public Participation, Research, Education and Outreach, and Local Capacity Building; (5) Domestic Fisheries Development; and (6) Recognizing the importance of island cultures and traditional fishing practices and community based management.

3. Prioritizing Fishery Development in the U.S. Pacific Territories

At present, specified fishing agreements between U.S. longline vessels out of Hawaii and territorial agreements are the only consistent source of annual funding for projects prioritized in the territorial MCPs; and that financial support is only contingent on active negotiated agreements. The need for U.S. Pacific Territories to each receive significant funding dedicated for fishery development and infrastructure to build community resiliency is also underscored within recent legislation and Executive Orders. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (2021)[17], the Build Back Better Act (2021)[18], and the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022[19] were enacted as part of a legislative framework for public investments in social, infrastructural, and environmental programs. Executive Order 14008 *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*[20] and Executive Order 12898 *Federal Actions To Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*[21] also mandated provisions for the federal

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[16] Allen, S. and P. Bartam. 2008. Guam as a Fishing Community. Pacific Islands Fish. Sci. Cent., Natl. Mar. Fish. Serv. NOAA, Honolulu,. Pacific Islands Fish. Sci. Cent. Admin. Rep. H-08-01, 61 p.

[17] https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3684

[18] https://financialservices.house.gov/issues/the-build-back-better-act.htm

[19] https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/19/fact-sheet-the-inflation-reduction-act-supports-workers-and-families/

[20] https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/

[21] https://www.archives.gov/files/federal-register/executive-orders/pdf/12898.pdf

government, including: to secure job development; enhance resilience to climate change; and protecting food security for underserved communities. The focus of these Presidential Executive Orders and legislation fully overlap with objectives of the territorial MCPs, noting that underserved Pacific Islander communities face disproportionate burdens. To date, concerted efforts dedicated for these specific purposes have not materialized.

Fisheries also provide critical dietary components, not only socially and culturally, but also to keep the community healthy through dietary habits. Based on current dietary and health trends, the diabetes rates in U.S. Pacific Territories is projected to increase and be about double the U.S. national average – with CNMI expecting to have 26% of its population diabetic by 2045.[22] In contrast, Samoa is projected to have a lower diabetes rate than the U.S. average and less than half of the projected diabetes rate in American Samoa (23%) by 2045.[21] The departure from fishery-related traditional practices and freshly-sourced diets, supplanted by imported diets and sedentary foreign-influenced lifestyles, has likely contributed to the current public health crises in U.S. Pacific Territories. Increasing fishing opportunities and access in the territories not only helps perpetuate U.S. Pacific Islander cultures on the water, but it keeps communities healthy.

Fishery participation in the territories still remains relatively low and has declined from long-term averages. Over the last decade in Guam, average annual participation in local bottomfish and reef fisheries have declined approximately 30% from historical long-term averages.[23] A similar reduction was noted in CNMI.[22] American Samoa has had consistent but low fishery participation, with just 12 vessels participating on average annually over the two decades[24]. Each territory has different infrastructural barriers to enhance fishing capacity, which are specified in the territorial MCPs. Common barriers among the territories include the lack of training for capacity building – for both fishers and local science/managers. Consistent financial support is needed for capacity building in each of the territories, as well as exploratory research to diversify fisheries in order to keep U.S. Pacific Islanders fishing and equip them to optimize their resources.

Marine infrastructure and fishery development are also linked to overarching international objectives of the U.S. For example, an increase in presence of U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) assets in the territories, accompanied by an increase in U.S. fisheries both on the water and in the markets, promote the objectives of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy[25]. However, this comes with significant need for federal investment. The U.S. Pacific Territories are situated in a region where Chinese presence is growing, which threatens the viability of U.S. commerce in the region. American Samoa's MCP includes projects related to increasing monitoring and

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[22] International Diabetes Federation, Diabetes Data Portal, https://diabetesatlas.org/data/en/

[23] WPRFMC. 2022. Annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation Report for the Mariana Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan 2021. Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council. Honolulu, Hawaii

[24] WPRFMC. 2022. Annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation Report for the American Samoa Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan 2021. Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council. Honolulu, Hawaii.

[25] Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States. February 2022. https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf

surveillance within the U.S. EEZ around American Samoa, which would require a more conspicuous USCG role. American Samoa fishermen and mariners have lamented the reliance on New Zealand in several instances, when the U.S. should have more prominent USCG presence in the territory. While there may be sufficient port infrastructure in Guam for USCG vessels, American Samoa lacks infrastructure for a full-time UCGS cutter. This renders a soft spot for U.S. presence in the region and leads to a vulnerability for safety at sea for territorial fisheries. In 2019, plans were made in CNMI for expansion of the Garapan Fishing Base so that a viable tuna fishing industry could offload catch and operate regionally out of the Marianas. To date that project is pending financial support. Guam also has aspirations to utilize its current port resources to bring back transshipments of tuna and other products to bolster its local economy and international relevance. Federal investments would be needed to revive these activities.

According to the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy, the U.S. Pacific Territories are within a region that includes half the world's population, 60% of global GDP, two-thirds of global economic growth, and 65% of the world's oceans. Considering that the U.S. Pacific Territories are at the vanguard of U.S. influence in a region where fisheries is the leading natural resource[26], significant federal financial investment in fisheries development and infrastructure is paramount.

[26] WPRFMC. 2022. *Waning US Influence and Impacts to Major US Pacific Tuna Fisheries within the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO): A Call for a US Government Strategic Plan.* 17 pp.

WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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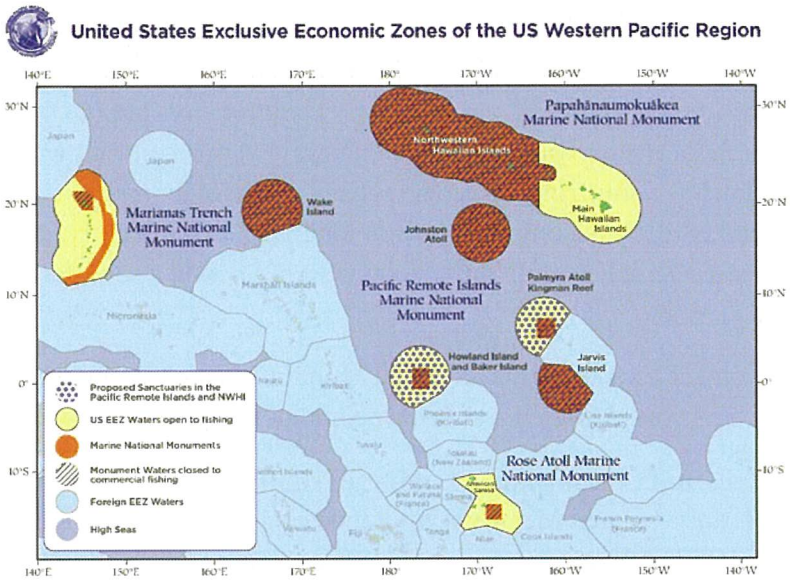
Fishermen Sound Alarm: US Government Policies Threaten Way of Life in US Pacific Islands

"We are affected by decisions today—we lose our fishery, culture, way of life."

HONOLULU (22 March 2024) Amidst mounting concerns and resounding frustration, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council convened its 198th meeting this week, where the voices of the fishing community advisors echoed with urgency. Their impassioned pleas highlighted the dire challenges facing the industry, including escalating anxieties over fishing area closures and the destabilizing impact of foreign seafood imports on market dynamics.



Hawai'i Advisory Panel (AP) member and Kaua'i fisherman Abraham Apilado, Jr. said, "If the goal is to sustain fisheries, major changes need to be made today. If the goal is to kill off the fishermen and resources, then keep doing what you're doing, because you're doing an amazing job."

The United States is proposing to overlay and extend the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (MNM) and potentially the Pacific Remote Islands MNM with sanctuary regulations, compounding current fishing closures (see map).

"The tuna industry is the only industry we have, the government relies on the canneries," said Gene Pan, American Samoa AP member and Fono Representative. "You are stopping us from fishing but not the Chinese. Without the people, there is no Samoa."

Council Chair Will Sword stressed, "Without the StarKist cannery, we cannot continue to sustain our cultural heritage and keep it vibrant—further disadvantaging our remaining 12 purse seine vessels in American Samoa affects our cannery."

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US Fishermen Sound Alarm: US Government Policies Threaten Way of Life 2-2-2-2-2

"Our purse seine boats can't compete because it's not a level playing field," said American Samoa AP member and Cape Fisheries CEO Joe Hamby. "The Seafood Import Monitoring Program is not working. U.S. fishers and processors should be protected by a duty on fish imports—seafood security is important. Fishing or processing, it's a matter of having the political will to defend against negative impacts to domestic producers."

Eric Kingma, Hawaii Longline Association executive director, said, "We are facing unprecedented market conditions. There is a large supply of fish coming in, driven by El Niño conditions. The market isn't there because of the huge amount of imported, subsidized, gassed tuna being 'dumped' into the market and retailers are not adjusting downward during periods of high local supply of fresh tuna. Not only is this bad for the local consumer, but it's unfair to the Hawai'i fishing industry. The subsidized foreign imports and retail price gouging on fresh landed 'ahi is really hurting the Hawai'i longline fleet. Recently, vessels are averaging $2-3 per pound for high quality 'ahi, but it's over $30 per pound at the store. It's not fair to consumers or fishermen."

Council Executive Director Kitty Simonds said, "If you were the President of the United States, which would you choose—the people of the U.S. or your legacy?"

Fish Stock Assessment Limitations in the Western Pacific

Hawai'i Council Member Matt Ramsey questioned how NOAA can develop strategies to promote seafood and equity and environmental justice (EEJ), while at the same time limiting fishing opportunities. Sam Rauch, NOAA deputy assistant administrator for regulatory programs, stated, "The goal of NMFS is not to limit fishing opportunities in general. In fact, NMFS is supposed to promote optimum yield, and that is the task that both the Council and NMFS are tasked with under the Magnuson-Stevens Act."

The Council endorsed the Hawai'i and Guam bottomfish stock assessments to update catch limits. The previous Guam assessment, which found the bottomfish stock complex was overfished, used a model likely not suited for data-limited fisheries. The latest assessment, which used the same model with updated catch data, showed an improved stock condition, but not enough to rebuild the stock.

"It is one of the things we have learned particularly in the Western Pacific," Rauch said. "Models that we apply to manage fisheries for [optimum yield] elsewhere in the country sometimes break down when they are applied to artisanal, cultural or subsistence fishing, much like the type of fishing that happens in the territories."

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council: Secretary of Commerce appointees from nominees selected by American Samoa, the CNMI, Guam and Hawai'i governors: Will Sword, noncommercial fisherman/engineer (American Samoa) (chair); Roger Dang, Fresh Island Fish Co. (Hawai'i) (vice chair); Manny Dueñas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Assn. (Guam) (vice chair); Judith Guthertz, University of Guam (Guam); Pete Itibus, noncommercial fisher (CNMI); Shaelene Kamaka'ala, Hawaiian Islands Land Trust (Hawai'i); Matt Ramsey, Conservation International (Hawai'i); and Gene Weaver, CNMI Judiciary (CNMI). Designated state officials: Dawn Chang, Hawai'i Dept. of Land & Natural Resources; Sylvan Igisomar, CNMI Dept. of Lands & Natural Resources (vice chair); Chelsa Muña, Guam Dept. of Agriculture; and Archie Soliai, American Samoa Dept. of Marine & Wildlife Resources (vice chair). Designated federal officials (voting): Sarah Malloy (acting), NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office. Designated federal officials (nonvoting): Colin Brinkman, U.S. State Dept.; Brian Peck, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; and RADM Michael Day, U.S. Coast Guard 14th District.

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