



Report for the Mariana Archipelago FEP Guam Advisory Panel Meeting

Saturday, May 30, 2025, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. (ChST)

Hybrid Meeting via Webex:

1. Welcome and Introductions

Clay Tam (AP Chair), Dominick San Gil (AP Vice Chair) opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m. (ChST), Guam AP Members in attendance Audrey Toves, Michael Gawel, Michael Dueñas, Carl Dela Cruz and James Borja. AP members not in attendance: Jason Miller, Dale Alvarez, Jesse Rosario (Excused).

Others in attendance include Joshua DeMello, Mark Mitsuyasu, Zach Yamada, Mark Fitchett, Felix Reyes (Council Staff), Alex Min (Pacific Island Fisheries Group), and Thomas Remington (Lynker).

2. Review of the Last AP Recommendations and Meeting

Felix Reyes, Council staff, provided a status review of the recommendations from the last AP meeting held on March 3, 2025. The AP recommended to inquire with the USCG on marine event plans, and GPD marine boating safety protocols, and Council staff is working with Council members and the military working group to develop a report on impacts to fisheries that will be presented to the Council at its June 2025 meeting. The AP recommended that the Council request PAG to include the fishing community in the development of its CIP to address fishery issues. The Council drafted a letter to PAG asking to include the fishing community in its planning. PAG did invite the Council and AP to tour its marinas and has been participating in military working group meetings and is aware of the fishery issues.

3. Guam Fisheries Issues

A. 2024 Guam SAFE Report

Thomas Remington, Council contractor, provided the Guam SAFE Report module for 2024. He said that the Council works with NOAA and the territorial agencies to pull together a yearly snapshot of what is going on in the region's fisheries. It covers what is happening in the fisheries as well as protected species, the environment, and fishermen's observations. He reported that bottomfish catch increased in 2024 and explained that the three-year average catch did not exceed the new rebuilding annual catch limit of 34,500 lb. With monitoring ecosystem component species, the most harvested species from creel surveys were assorted reef fish, followed by atulai. Priority species showed that tataga had the highest catch, followed by gadao. The pelagic fishery showed a decreasing trend in troll effort but remained consistent with 2023. There was a decrease in total estimated catch driven by skipjack and yellowfin but an increase for non-tuna species due to increases in mahimahi and blue marlin.

The SAFE report tracks fishing access, such as the notice to mariners, for warning boaters of military exercises around Guam. There were 51 Notice to Mariners during 2025 and 55 warning days for W-517. The report keeps track of the weather with 110 high surf warning days (74 small craft advisories) and two cyclone warning events in 2024. Fisher's observations noted the tiao run was slow with short windows, strong mahi catch, small marlins, stronger

currents, low commercial catch, and that seasons have been out of sync. There were fewer trips during 2024, due to fear of flooding the market, shark depredation, loss of electricity, and increased marina traffic.

The Life History section of the report showed significant progress for BMUS sample collections in 2023. PIFSC held a biosampling summit in November 2024, where it provided fishers incentives to donate juveniles for deepwater snappers, and length-weight parameters were completed. Regarding socioeconomics, fuel costs were consistent in 2023. Bottomfishing 2024 revenue and price data remained confidential and non-disclosed. Trolling (pelagics) showed 2023 revenue, price data remains confidential and non-disclosed. The report included recommendations for enhancing data collection, which the Council may consider during upcoming meetings.

An AP member said he was interested in why there was an increase in small marlins.

The AP Vice Chair said fuel prices were consistent, but fishers still waste money when lines are taken by sharks, they lose time and fish and ask if gear loss is included in the SAFE report.

Remington said the full report includes trip costs, gear replacement, new bait, ice, etc. All regions are struggling with sharks. Brent Tibbatts, DAWR, said they are tracking shark interaction in the creel surveys. However, it is how to mitigate or manage against that that is important, since it is making it less efficient. Fishers have asked if it is worth fishing with these challenges.

The AP Vice Chair asked if there are incentives for providing juvenile lehi and onaga to the life history program.

Remington replied yes via the biosampling program. They have been able to buy fish from fishers and resell them to the market for a better price. They are having trouble getting small fish samples. They are also working with Lynker and Arc Environmental, using a raffle for coolers and electric reels as incentives for participation, with information to feed into the stock assessment. Outreach to fishers to be included in the program. Arc will share a flyer when ready.

An AP member asked about the revamping of the structure and content of the SAFE reports and how it is different from before, and wanted to know if there are new specific areas to focus on.

Remington said the report is revised for presentation and to make sure it is focused on highlights. The previous bottomfish rebuilding ACL was 31,000 pounds. It is now 34,500 pounds, and the change was due to the assessment that Guam is not overfished. Any excess in catch over three years that is above the ACL, then that difference will be taken away from the next year's ACL. It is a little more restrictive under this rebuilding plan because if the ACL is exceeded, there will be closure.

An AP member asked if the blank areas in the report were due to confidentiality and how much of these blank pages affect the ACL.

Remington replied that it is blank because it is being presented publicly, although the information is available and visible at NOAA. There is the rule of three: Three vendors must report before the data is shared publicly. There is a waiver from the Coop, and so the information is available.

4. Council IRA Project Update

A. Scenario Planning

Joshua DeMello, Council staff, reported that contracts have been initiated for scenario planning, and the contractors plan to conduct workshops in Hawaii over the fall and before 2026 and in American Samoa in the first and second quarters of 2026. He said that more information will be available in September once the steering committee has been convened.

He reported that the small-boat scenario planning will occur after the first big-boat scenario planning is done, likely next year. The Council is still working on finding a contractor for that project, but the other projects, such as the community engagement and regulatory review, will provide input into those meetings. Hawaii small-boat engagement is planned for later this year and will incorporate some of this project as well.

B. Regulatory Review

Joshua DeMello provided an update on the Council's IRA projects on regulatory review. The contractor should start next month and will look at FEP and local regulations. They will also examine whether the regulations are climate ready. The AP should consider regulations that should be removed, determining what is good, bad, or needs work. Once the contractor is done with the reviews, they will come back out to meet with the community.

C. Community Consultation

Alex Min, Pacific Islands Fisheries Group (PIFG), provided an update on the IRA community consultation project that includes planned community meetings and the vocational fisheries course. To date, PIFG has conducted public meetings in Guam, CNMI, and Hawaii, and will be traveling to American Samoa in June 2025. The purpose of these meetings was to meet with communities and hear their concerns and needs, as well as identify how climate change is impacting them. Key takeaways from Guam reported shark interactions are increasing, and sharks know how to wait for fishing boats. There is environmental degradation, youth disconnect, and cultural loss, unable to pass down knowledge to the next generation, and there are enforcement and equity issues as well. In addition to the community consultation meetings, PIFG will be conducting a Young Fishers Vocation Training that will be held in September 2025.

An AP member said that the military buildup is negatively impacting the Guam fishing community. Marinas have poor lighting and no security. As the only female charter, she usually arrives at the Agana Marina around 3:00 a.m. and has experienced fear. There is limited accessibility with trailers and vehicle parking, leaving no spaces to park. At Agat Marina, the launch ramp finger is concrete, and at high tide, vessels being launched are unable to be secured because the water is too high. It should be a floating finger. She said the Pilot Program would help fishers get involved in a career in fisheries. There needs to be more community involvement. We are trying to find ways to get more involved.

Min said it is frustrating for so few fishers who show up to meetings. Only a few who speak for the many.

An AP member said the Guam Community College is starting a summer program focused on training in marine motors and marine-related activities. The program was to start May 27, but due to a lack of people who signed up, it was postponed until there is enough interest.

5. AP Strategic Planning for 2025/2026

Felix Reyes, Council staff, said that the Guam AP worked with the CNMI AP to develop a strategic plan for 2025. The AP plan included projects focused on military buildup, fisher's proclamation week, and fishing tournament outreach.

The AP Vice Chair said that with the military expansion, the community needs to make sure all corners are met. With the many things going on with the military activities in Guam, each AP member is assigned tasks to report at the informal AP on what the military is doing.

6. Guam Military Working Group Update

Staff provided a brief and an update to the Council's military working group and standing committee. At its 199th meeting in Honolulu, the Council directed staff to convene a working group to analyze the impacts of the military buildup to fisheries and the Guam fishing community. At its 202nd meeting in Honolulu, the Council elevated the stature of the efforts of the working group and created the Council's Military Buildup Standing Committee, with Department of Agriculture/DAWR director Chelsa Muña from Guam and Division of Lands and Natural Resources Secretary Sylvan Igisomar for CNMI. The respective CNMI and Guam Council members serve as members. The working group developed a few recommendations to present to the buildup standing committee for review, discussion and presentation to the Council at its 203rd meeting for action.

An AP member said there was not enough information given regarding the Agana Marina during the port-hosted tour of marinas, although electrical work has started for lighting. The washdown ramp is not needed. The water outlet for boat washdown is capped off, but should be accessible. In Agat, anyone can use the faucet, and there is no charge. This is charged in Agana. The AP member asked for assistance from the working group to help with these matters.

An AP member asked if there will be changes to the fishing community related to the three new Department of Defense command changes in Guam.

Council staff said major changes to the fishing community are not anticipated. The permanent civilian staff of the three military branches are static so there will be continuity.

An AP member added the Maesono Mayor committed \$5k towards the mafuti derby.

Another AP member said that as a charter, it was not just the marines arriving due to expansion that is noticeable with her business the past two months, it has also been a mix of Air

Force and Navy active duty and contractors on Guam to make repairs to military facilities due to typhoon damage.

The AP Vice Chair said that for every marine stationed in Guam, 25 people are behind them as a support group. This will affect our fishing community as well. A greater number of folks will come to Guam than is shared.

7. Public Comment

There were no requests for public comment.

8. Discussion and Recommendations

Regarding Guam Fisheries,

- **The Guam Advisory Panel recommends the Council explore the feasibility of developing a longline fishery (resource availability) and market (local, export, transshipment) for tropical tunas in the Marianas.**

The Guam AP agreed that fishery development was needed and that the Council could provide assistance in determining the feasibility of a longline fishery and markets for fisheries.

The AP Vice Chair reported that following the departure of Guam's last longline fishing company in December 2020, which severely disrupted tuna markets in Asia and the transshipment sector in Guam, there is a renewed interest in reassessing the viability of the industry. This study should aim to encourage and develop local fisheries for bigeye tuna and assess the current state of key markets in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United States, to determine whether conditions have sufficiently improved to support a sustainable and economically viable commercial tuna fishery focused on Bigeye Tuna and related species.

Council staff asked if the intent of the recommendation is to develop a longline fishery in Guam.

The Vice Chair said yes. There is interest in developing a fishery industry so that reliance on the military does not occur.

Council staff said there has been scoping in the Mariana Islands as a whole. It might be beneficial to investigate a Marianas-wide effort because Guam has the port. Guam can offer incentives for transshipment. Guam had a transshipment operation before, but was supplanted by the Federated States of Micronesia. This could be a request for the science center with a stock assessment coming in 2026. The SPC can see what the abundance of BET within Guam's EEZ is. Another option is to ask what kind of market development this will include and whether the fish will be shipped elsewhere or consumed in Guam. With PRIAs opening, purse seine fishery could be an opportunity as they could fish in the west and east Pacific. Incentives can be put in place to offload in Guam. It is an opportunity for the territories to tap into tropical tunas. With more US-flagged purse-seine vessels fishing, they would need to offload in the western and central Pacific, and Guam could be a viable option.

- **The Guam Advisory Panel recommends the Council request DAWR look at SPC FAD designs, including the use of biodegradable and environmentally sustainable**

materials, in the development of future FADs to provide longevity and reduce the cost of deployment.

The AP agreed that the high cost of procurement and deployment of FAD buoys comes at the expense of the fishing community. When buoys detach, they must sail farther, spending more time and fuel, to get to the fishing grounds. Alternatives must be explored to ease this process, and the AP feels the use of lighter, environmentally friendly FAD buoys is the way to go, including making the process private.

The Vice Chair said FAD buoys typically remain deployed for up to 2 years. Given their prolonged presence in the marine environment, it is both environmentally responsible and economically sensible to explore the use of construction materials that are biodegradable, cost-effective, and feasible for deployment. The Pacific Community (SPC) FAD design is lighter than the current systems used by DAWR, can be deployed using smaller vessels, has been used in waters down to 3,000 feet, and has withstood storms and poor sea conditions. FAD buoys play a critical role in supporting Guam's offshore fishing community by enhancing catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE), increasing safety at sea, and contributing to local food security and the island's economy through both subsistence and commercial fishing.

An AP member said the PacIOOS wave buoys deployed at two locations off Guam rarely get detached and lost. They outlast the regular buoys now being used.

Another AP member said the PacIOOS buoys are lighter. There is a need to explore other avenues for DAWR to keep deploying FADs, including ways to avoid the Government of Guam GSA procurement process. Alternatives should be explored. The GSA procurement process must go to the lowest bidder, and historically, there has always been one bidder in Guam. DAWR explored a lighter system in the past year, but that system failed.

An AP member said the AP must encourage working with the SPC since Guam is a member of the SPC.

10. Other Business

Council staff reported the Mariana Islands Training and Testing (MITT) folks are coming to Guam and would like to meet with fishers and the AP on June 18, to discuss what they are planning in Guam's waters.

An AP member said a Guam fisherman is still missing. Prior to that, a Hawaiian fisherman went missing. And later, CNMI AP member Cecilio Raiakuilipiy's crew went missing. Guam's boaters do not understand the extent to which they must know and understand to be safe at sea. Knowing about safety at sea, how to use their electronic gear, and how to navigate. Guam's fishermen are illiterate. In the past, in Guam, when a boater registered their vessel, GPD had an office at the Agana Marina where boats were inspected as part of their annual safety check. This should be implemented again. Fishers need to know what to do in a distress situation.

Vice Chair San Gil suggested a meeting be set up with the local USCG Auxiliary and with the GPD Boating Safety leadership to discuss safety at sea concerns. The meeting will be set up as soon as possible by the staff.

The AP Vice Chair said BSP is collecting import data for Guam; however, funding for this project is inconsistent. With a noticeable increase in seafood consumption in Guam, which is evident in the growing number of retail outlets offering fresh and frozen pelagic and reef fish, the AP is seeking reliable and detailed data on seafood imports. The study should identify the primary source markets, assess annual import volumes and trends over time, and evaluate the potential economic impacts on local fisheries. Specifically, the AP is interested in understanding how imported seafood may influence local fish prices, affect the income of Guam's fishermen, and shape the broader dynamics of the island's seafood economy.

An AP member said this process is very important. The community is venturing more into imported fish, which is affecting local fishers.

Another AP member said there is a need to look at consumers who buy imported fish. Much of the fish in demand is pre-made and packaged. Many are looking for seafood. Folks want fast things and access to readily available fish.

An AP member said there is support for fisheries development to look for alternatives for local fishermen. There is a need for small boats to explore green stick or vertical longline fishing.

An AP member said he would like to learn more about the exploration vessel Nautilus' expeditions conducted in the Mariana Islands. The research vessel just finished a Guam and CNMI cruise. They found some unknown seamounts and a video of the bottomfish and their habitat at Maug.

PIFSC's Eric Cruz said the cruise did deep-sea ROV exploration and mapping around Guam.

The meeting ended at 12: 11 p.m., ChST