

Summary Report to the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council 7 May 2025

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



Kauai Community Meeting 4/28/25

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

Background: The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council) is leading an initiative to enhance climate resilience and fisheries management across the Pacific Islands. As climate-related and regulatory challenges impact fisheries, the Council is engaging fishing communities to understand barriers to fishing, environmental changes, and potential solutions. Over the next two years (2025-2026), the Council will carry out the projects included in its IRA initiative to inform management decisions and improve the policy making process. This initiative includes four IRA priority areas:

1. Scenario Planning – Preparing fisheries for changing environmental & economic conditions.
2. Regulatory Review – Ensuring fishery policies remain relevant and adaptive.
3. Protected Species Management – Updating policies to address species interactions.

4. Community Engagement & Capacity Building – Strengthening participation in fisheries governance.

Overview of Activities:

Research Questions &

Engagement Approach: The consultation process was designed to listen, learn, and understand how Pacific Islands fishing communities are adapting to environmental and regulatory changes. To facilitate participation and information exchange, introductory briefings were kept short and on point. Where possible, meeting spaces were arranged in a circle or hollow square to encourage healthy dialog among



community members in a facilitated forum. Participants were asked a series of questions focused on three central themes:

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

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

- Shark depredation and challenges of abundance from sharks with fisher conflict.
- Access issues across MHIs continues to impact fishers ranging from tourism, infrastructure issues, homeless (not safe for vehicles/trailers), disrepair of small boat harbors/ramps, shoals affecting launching, lava overflow of boat ramp.

- Commercial fishing is harder to continue participating in. Very few full-time commercial fishers remain in Hawaii Small-Boat Fleet. Most are part-time commercial. Challenges extend beyond the commercial fishing operation to fish cutters, human capital and shore-side infrastructure.
- Certain species such as akule (bigeye Scad) and Ta'ape are abundant, but lack viable markets to catch at capacity.

Meetings held across the Main Hawaiian Islands Round 1: Meetings were held across the Main Hawaiian Islands to engage the fishing community and hear their feedback and perspectives on the topics relating to climate change and environmental changes. Each meeting had different issues and concerns although specific overarching themes were present across meetings including access, shark depredation, and the challenges of commercial fishing. The community was interested in further opportunities to engage, share feedback, and support positive action to increase the overall knowledge and data gaps.

| Date | Location | Top Climate/Fishery Impacts Shared |
|---------|--------------|--|
| 4/22/25 | Maui, HI | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run into more sharks and they are more aggressive now and you gotta scare them away. • Cost of fishing makes it difficult for rec/noncommercial fishers causing them to reduce their efforts and times on the water. • (Fishing) grounds changed; used to have sand and mud, now rocks; different species; shark depredation is more; gotta know currents; fish deeper in summer cause water temps at surface is important. • All of the harbors are overused, underfunded, and not safe. • Nearshore is definitely less fish now; but you gotta know where to go-got fish; maalaea runoff is crazy-no more tako or fish, gotta go country |
| 4/23/25 | Lanai, HI | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never watched what was a king tide and in the past it was like that. The worst thing they are seeing is sediment erosion and the turtle overpopulation and they have tumors and there is too much and there is an imbalance. • They used to have a lot of aku, but after Covid there was less. • There is a need for a lot of education and investment into the next generation and you can't take everything and need to think sustainably and you can't have everything and not be entitled and put your hand to the ground and pull some weeds. |
| 4/24/25 | Moloka'i, HI | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the last 10-12 years, increased shark (i.e. tiger) depredation in bottomfish grounds and learned behavior to fishing vessels See changes all the time and been doing a lot of land management and in the last 3 years there was big changes and if there is changes on the land there will be changes in the ocean • Molokai did have 50 years of pineapple industry that affected the habitat and now the turtles with tumors are gone. They have a problem and it can be fixed with stewardship. |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe consider tax breaks for invasive species |
| 4/28/25 | Kauai, HI | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People think they are pau bombing Kauula rock and in 2017 they were still shooting the island and has been there is couple occasion where they drop parachute flares around the rocks and give fishers an hour to retreat back and people are not listening to the fisherman and people need to cry about the Navy and their effect on the birds. This is still happening 3-5 times a year. Need to follow up on the need for notice to mariners. • Overpopulation of sharks and need for a hunting license system to feed families and that is part of the issue contributing to the balance and could be attributed to the shark attack. • Guys are dealing with monk seals off the buoy when fishing pelagics and the deep 7 grounds • Hardest issue is with the labor to fish and cut filets • Fishermen as a trade is dying and there is a lot of guys with small boats and who would be the person to get more FADs on the 500 and generate safe interest in new fishermen • Biggest change is access and they always respected the fishers and they had interactions with new fishers and tourists. Anini Boat channel and that is a boating channel and there have been issues with access for the fishing community and they don't want to fish around tourists and there are a lot of people buying land and blocking the access points. • 2017 had big tuna piles and had a few pilot whales; now we get tons of pilot whales targeting tuna schools; they are in bigger pods and probably eating a lot of the fish |
| 4/29/25 | Waianae, HI | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some species have less; most species about the same; after Iwa the coral structure changed. Now finger coral off the harbor have come back. • No decline in akule and opelu • Strong Akule run but change going on, used to come in Sept and had a season for halalu; now no more the schools all mixing and can't avoid catching small ones • Kalaeloa harbor opened and had 50-80 k lbs that used to be able to roam down the coast and now locked up in the harbor-defacto MPA • Sharks are bad; wasn't bad until they started protecting it; the buoys got so much sharks and they taking the bigger shibi • Observed halalu schools 7 miles out at sea and in the middle of the Oahu/Kauai channel. |
| 4/30/25 | Honolulu, HI | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grew up in Ewa and growing up there were plenty of fish and when he got older and went to LCC and one thing he noticed is that the limu is gone but that is correlated with ecosystem change and every house had a pipe going into the ocean in addition to the sugar cane. The sewage system is different and there was so much fertilizing feeding the ocean. They made a secondary treatment and no longer see that on the shoreline and used to have omaka in pearl harbor and Kaneohe as well as the nehu. Don't have the bottom of the food chain to feed the top. • There is less aku but they seem to be coming back and that |

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| | | <p>may be correlated with the marlin run. There used to be a aku pile out of koolina and it seems to be cyclical.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Onshore and offshore, there is a climate change effect and how much is that correlated. On the offshore side there is no predictability and there is a obs of CC and water flow and also consider shark depredation. |
| 3/13/25 | Kona, HI* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seasonal runs are off - albacore still active, strong marlin run, average ahi size smaller, ● Depredation by sharks, porpoise increasing; sharks take 80% of fish now; porpoises take ahi up to 50 lbs (used to be 20lbs); learn to cut off lines. ● Conflicts from shark tours at FADs; increase shark abundance and safety of divers around active trolling/fishing |
| 3/14/25 | Hilo, HI* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There were a lot more N NW currents and bigger waves. ● Seeing more Knifefjaws than in the past. ● Noticed decline of aku. |

* Kona and Hilo meetings, conducted during the previous month, were added to the list.



Community meeting Honolulu, HI 4/30/25

Links to IRA Priorities 1-3: The community consultation process identified clear linkages to the other three priority areas which will be beneficial to those efforts once initiated. Cross-cutting themes to other priorities including regulation review, Scenario

Planning for Future Fishery, and Protected Species all had applied comments within the meetings. The list below outlines a number of the concerns and comments voiced by the community that relate to each IRA priority area beyond the community consultation.

IRA Priority 2: Regulatory Review

Review existing regulatory frameworks to identify gaps, overlaps, inefficiencies, or areas that need modernization.

Shortline Regulation:

“Shortlines catch smarter fish inside 1000 fathoms—should be managed.”

Call for regulation or Council oversight on shortline gear types.

Charter vs. Commercial Licensing Conflict:

“Charter fishers drop fish at market—compete with commercial, unlike mainland.”

Suggests regulatory inconsistency that needs separation, review, or updated license classes.

Confusing Regulatory Communication:

“QR codes for regs are confusing.”

Highlights a communication barrier—supports modernization of information delivery and or challenges the community is facing with technology, regulations from Community-based fishery Subsistence Areas and communication issues.

Rules Lacking Enforcement:

“Rules don’t matter if not enforced—though DOCARE presence is better now.”

Indicates regulatory failure due to weak enforcement, though also acknowledges the improvement over the decades by staffing increase and personnel hour allocation.

Misaligned Size/Season Rules:

“Moi season needs to be extended; 11-inch rule ignores egg presence.”

While Moi is nearshore (state managed), there may be a broader need across species for seasons/size limits potentially suggests outdated or ecologically misaligned size regulations that may be changing with climate change.

IRA Priority 1: Scenario Planning for the Future Fishery

Develop forward-looking management approaches based on environmental, social, and economic scenarios.

Environmental Uncertainty and Climate Trends:

“Currents are stronger; buoys submerge.”

“Warmer water, longer south swell.”

“More El Niño events, more king tides.”

Observations reflect a shifting ocean that warrants scenario-based planning.

Economic Insecurity:

“Fish sale prices haven’t gone up in 20 years; markets get the money.”

“Best fishermen...haven’t evolved as businessmen.”

Need for forward-looking market and economic support mechanisms for the fishing community, business practices may become a barrier to entry for future fishers.

Fisher Decline & Youth Entry Barrier:

“Can’t compete... young guys trying to commercial fish... getting harder.”

Future planning must consider generational transition challenges.

Infrastructure Planning:

“Buoys submerge; need longer scope.”

“Need to reevaluate buoy infrastructure.”

Suggested physical fishery infrastructure needs to be redesigned for future conditions, stronger currents, and or other oceanic conditions we may be seeing more often e.g. buoys breaking away constantly, creating challenges for small-boat fisheries.

IRA Priority 3: Protected Species Management

Ensure conservation of protected species (e.g., monk seals, sharks) while balancing fishery access and cultural practices.

Shark Depredation as a Critical Issue:

“Steno & shark pods... eating larger ahi; biting lines.”

“More sharks... buoy sharks ruin trips.”

Shark depredation is destabilizing fisheries and threatening the way of life for commercial fishers.

Call for Cultural Use Permits:

“Used to be a market for sharks; now can’t get permits, even for traditional use.”

“Native Hawaiian practices and resource use... should be supported through permits.”

Direct request for permitting pathways for cultural take from the community. Unsure of the roadmap to get there, though there was strong interest across the communities on this.

Monk Seal Concerns:

“Monk seals are increasing; don’t bring more.”

“Monk seals causing imbalance—no limu.”

Community observes ecological imbalances due to increased protected species populations.

Protected Species Regulation Imbalance:

“Tourist shark tours at buoys... fishermen go home without fish.”

Call to regulate interactions that favor tourism over food access.

Marine Mammals

“2017 had big tuna piles and had a few pilot whales; now we get tons of pilot whales targeting tuna schools; they are in bigger pods and probably eating a lot of the fish”

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