

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



**REPORT TO THE 204th
WESTERN PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL MEETING**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO) is responsible for assisting the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) in the development of fishery management plans and amendments, initiating Federal fishing regulations, issuing Federal fishing permits, and monitoring fisheries. Other major responsibilities include the conservation and recovery of protected species, conservation and restoration of marine habitats, including the Pacific marine national monuments, and coordination with international organizations to implement fishery agreements and treaties. The following information is provided to update the Council on NMFS activities since the 203rd Council meeting.

SPOTLIGHT: New Activity on Deep Sea Mining

Activities related to deep sea mining are occurring in three geographies: American Samoa, Cook Islands, and on the high seas in the Clarion Clipperton Zone (CCZ).

For areas within the U.S. EEZ, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has authority to grant leases for commercial development of deep sea critical minerals. On April 8, 2025, Impossible Metals Inc. submitted an unsolicited mineral lease sale request for an area located in the EEZ of American Samoa. BOEM [published](#) a [Request for Information](#) on June 16. American Samoa submitted a [letter to the BOEM docket](#) expressing opposition to deep sea mining in the EEZ. Multiple NOAA line offices submitted a [One NOAA letter](#) to the docket on August 12 with information on NOAA trust resources that may interact with mining operations. NMFS PIR and BOEM are coordinating closely to evaluate and address potential environmental impacts to fisheries, ensuring that territorial concerns in American Samoa are fully considered. This includes NMFS staff in American Samoa meeting with BOEM on September 18.

For areas beyond national jurisdiction, NOAA Office of Coastal Management (OCM) has authority to issue exploration licenses and extraction permits under the Deep Seabed Hard Minerals Resources Act (DSHMRA). OCM currently has four applications for exploration and one for extraction, all in the CCZ. As these are the first applications under DSHMRA since the 1980's, NMFS PIR is coordinating with OCM to understand the process.

In the Cook Islands, NOAA is working with their government on a potential research cruise this fall.

RULEMAKING

On June 10, 2025, NMFS announced in the *Federal Register* its approval of an amended Marine Conservation Plan (MCP) for Guam ([90 FR 24384](#)). The amendment refines plans for

the expansion of the Hagatña Marina Channel fishing platform in Paseo de Susana Park that was previously approved by NMFS in March 18, 2024 (See *“Program Strategy 5.3, the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessible Fishing Platform”*). There are no other changes to the MCP at this time. This agency decision is effective from June 10, 2025 through August 3, 2026.

On July 15, 2025, NMFS published a final rule to designate critical habitat for 5 threatened coral species under the Endangered Species Act. This action satisfies the terms of a settlement agreement between NOAA and the Center for Biological Diversity that required NMFS to submit to the *Federal Register* for publication a final determination concerning the designation of critical habitat for listed species of Indo-Pacific coral found in U.S. waters by July 15, 2025. The designated critical habitat encompasses approximately 92 square miles (237 square kilometers), which represents a reduction in total area from the 2023 proposed rule, and includes 18 specific island units in American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, and the Pacific Remote Islands Area.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Habitat Conservation

In the last three months, NMFS has completed 15 individual essential fish habitat (EFH) consultations, as well as 6 EFH consultations reviewed using multiple programmatic consultations. The individual consultations included, but are not limited to: the use of native urchins as biocontrol for invasive algae in Kane’ohe Bay, USS Arizona Memorial platform removals, Maui Nui Marine Research Council coral restoration, and Department of Defense Hawaii California Training and Testing.

In August 2025, PIRO funded a contract (FishBANC) to streamline the development process and provide cost efficient tools for ongoing nearshore fisheries management by Territorial partners. This contract continues a multi-year effort that PIRO has undertaken to assist CNMI, Guam, and American Samoa in developing comprehensive coral reef fisheries management plans (FMP), including defining conservation goals, performing management strategy evaluations to consider alternative management structures, and developing fishing regulations. The success of this project may allow NMFS and the Council to explore potentially delegating to Territorial partners, the management of certain shallow-water bottomfish fisheries in Federal waters, under MSA 306, reducing NMFS efforts, saving the agency money, and ensuring greater territorial involvement in the conservation of essential fish habitats in both State and Federal waters.

International Fisheries

In July 2025, PIRO attended the 10th Meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC). In Toyama, Japan, PIRO attended the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Northern Committee (NC) Joint Working Group (JWG10) on the Management of Pacific bluefin tuna (July 9-12), and the 21st Regular Session of the WCPFC-NC (NC21, July 14-15). The JWG10 is developing a long-term harvest strategy for Pacific bluefin tuna but was unable to reach consensus on a harvest control rule. As a result, members agreed to hold discussions at the margins of upcoming IATTC and WCPFC meetings,

and communicate needs about any future virtual intersessional sessions prior to JWG11 in July 2026. The NC21 discussed management of Northern stocks, specifically, Pacific bluefin tuna, North Pacific albacore, and North Pacific swordfish. Among other objectives, the United States was successful in securing agreement at NC21 to initiate a management strategy evaluation for Western and Central North Pacific Ocean swordfish.

On July 31, 2025 PIRO supported NOAA Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (PDAS) Lawler at the Second Informal IATTC-WCPFC JWG on South Pacific Albacore (SPA JWG). The informal session produced two documents (SPA JWG draft Terms of Reference and draft Workplan) for consideration by both RFMOs at their respective forthcoming annual meetings (IATTC in September and WCPFC in December). If the Terms of Reference and Workplan are adopted by both RFMOs, the inaugural IATTC-WCPFC SPA JWG would be held online in early 2026.

On August 13-21, 2025, PIRO participated in the 21st Regular Session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee in Nuku'alofa, Tonga.

PIRO and PIFSC also supported NOAA PDAS Lawler at the WCPFC's first South Pacific Albacore Management Workshop (SPAM-WS) held online September 10 and 11. In preparation for the SPAM-WS, and in response to a recommendation from the 203rd Council meeting, PIRO and PIFSC met with Council staff and American Samoa government officials to share and discuss analyses of south Pacific albacore longline trends in the WCPFC Area.

Protected Resources

On July 25, 2024, NMFS published a 12-month finding and proposed rule in response to a 2016 petition to list 10 species of giant clams as threatened or endangered under the ESA throughout their respective ranges ([89 FR 60498](#)). NMFS is proposing to list six species due to their extinction risk (five endangered, one threatened) and an additional four species due to their similarity of appearance hindering enforcement of illegal import/export, which is allowed under ESA section 4(e) in special cases. NMFS held a series of in-person public forums and hearings throughout the Pacific Island territories, including American Sāmoa, CNMI, and Guam. In response to several requests, the public comment period was extended by 120 days and closed on February 19, 2024. NMFS is currently in the process of reviewing the 29,643 comments received in association with this proposed rule.

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

On July 22, 2025 NMFS completed a biological opinion with PIRO PRD on an [Oceanic Whitetip Shark Genetic Research Study](#), and on July 27, 2025 completed a biological opinion with U.S.

Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Pacific U.S. Naval Base Guam on its [Glass Breakwater and Apra Waterfront Repairs Project](#).

Sustainable Fisheries

In June and July 2025, PIRO staff assisted NOAA in undertaking a review of marine national monuments as part of the agency's task under [Executive Order 14276](#) *Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness*. Part 4(h) of the executive order instructs the Secretary of Commerce, in consultation with the Secretary of the Interior, to review all existing marine national monuments and provide recommendations to the President of any monument areas that should be opened to commercial fishing. In making these recommendations, the Secretary of Commerce will consider whether the opening of the monuments to commercial fishing would be consistent with the preservation of the historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest originally identified in the proclamations establishing the marine national monuments.

On August 4-7, 2025, NMFS Office of Aquaculture Director, Danielle Blacklock and PIRO Regional Aquaculture Coordinator Tori Spence participated in an Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) aquaculture-focused visit to Kona and Honolulu for Sea Grant fellows from the U.S. Congressional committees offices. These Sea Grant fellows are staff members in offices of Senators and Representatives from Massachusetts, Delaware, California, Alaska, New Jersey, Florida, and New York. Some of those Senators sit on the Senate Committees on Commerce, Science, and Transportation; Environment and Public Works; and Armed Services. Some of those Representatives sit on the House Committees on Natural Resources (Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries); and Energy and Commerce. EDF has been a strong advocate for frameworks and standards for offshore aquaculture and organized this visit to highlight the value of growing this industry responsibly and in collaboration with coastal and fishing communities. In Kona, the group visited the State of Hawaii's aquaculture facilities at [Host Park/NELHA](#) and the traditional Hawaiian fishpond (loko i'a) at Kīholo. In Honolulu, they toured the NMFS Ford Island facilities, attended the Honolulu Fish Auction, and participated in a panel discussion about opportunities and challenges for aquaculture in the Pacific Islands region with representatives from Hawai'i Sea Grant, Hawai'i Department of Agriculture, PIRO, and the Pacific Islands Fisheries Group.

In August 2025, the Department of Commerce approved a multi-year grant with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission to help NMFS operationalize EM in Pacific Island longline fisheries. This partnership will help us to equip all vessels in the fleet with EM systems, review, process and store EM collected data, and establish the data collection protocols, data infrastructure and data integration with national fisheries monitoring data systems. We are making this investment in EM because the cost of our at-sea observer program continues to increase, and we project future funding for this program will be insufficient to maintain observer coverage at historical levels.

NMFS continues to provide required annual Protected Species Workshop (PSW) training to the longline fleet, with a live PSW certification course offered each week. An in-person only version

of the course is offered on the first Friday of each month, and otherwise runs as a hybrid course depending on participant availability. So far during 2025, NMFS has held 27 live workshops (12 in-person only, 3 Webinar only, and 12 hybrid). Until recently NMFS also offered an online recertification option that could be taken two out of every three years. The online program was discontinued recently due to new internet security requirements. These combined efforts have led to 197 total certifications this year.

NMFS also continues to provide a monthly Protected Species Crew Training Program to longline crew members. Since initiating the program in April 2024, we have trained a total of 696 (unique) crew members representing 132 (unique) vessels, and a grand total of 779 crew members from across 191 vessels, including repeat attendance by crew and vessels. NMFS has also offered weekly crew training options, and will continue to evaluate training options based on need and available staff resources. Summary data of completed training classes are provided below.

Crew Training Program			
Date	Workshops	Total Vessels	Total participants
04/19/2024	3	8	26
05/10/2024	2	18	81
06/21/2024	2	21	96
07/12/2024	2	19	78
08/23/2024	2	18	85
09/27/2024	2	23	91
11/08/2024	2	16	69
12/13/2024	2	13	53
01/24/2025	2	17	63
03/07/2025	2	14	53
04/18/2025	2	6	27
04/25/2025	2	10	28
05/2025	3	4	14
06/2025	2	2	7
07/2025	2	2	11
TOTAL	32	183	779

Handouts and instructions have been delivered as additional outreach and information source for fishers and crew along with the long-form guidelines (downloadable PDFs in [English](#), [Tagalog](#), [Indonesian](#), and [Vietnamese](#)) and a matching animated [video](#) have been available online. Translated captions for the video are available in Tagalog, Ilocano, Samoan, Indonesian and Vietnamese. Document links can be found on the PIRO PSW [webpage](#) and the NOAA [digital resource library webpage](#).

NMFS continues to update information on fish catch limits, available on the [website](#).

NMFS continues to assist fishermen with processing permit transactions electronically. Under the electronic application process, all applications must be submitted online through NMFS National Permit System or through the Kiteworks secure file transfer. Fee payments are processed in NPS or through the Department of Treasury's [pay.gov](#) secure online payment system. PIRO's permit website includes [instructions](#) for fishing permit applications and for 2025 Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) certificates. Applicants may contact NMFS for individual assistance at piro-permits@noaa.gov or (808) 725-5190. Applicants may also visit the [website](#) for current fishing permit status.

In 2025 through 2026, NMFS is migrating all Pacific Islands Region permit applications and processing to the online NPS system to improve public access, efficiencies and tracking. In addition to NPS system enhancements, NMFS may offer outreach events and educational materials to introduce the system to permit holders in all the islands, depending on funding. We expect WCPFC Area Endorsement and Western Pacific General Longline permit applications to be available on NPS soon, then followed by American Samoa Longline and Northern Mariana Islands Bottomfish permit applications in the coming months.

Permits as of August 14, 2025:

Permit	Number
Pelagic	
Hawaii longline (limited entry)	149 active, 15 inactive/no-vessel (164 of 164)
American Samoa longline (limited entry)	20 current, 40 available (60 of 60)
Western Pacific general longline	-
Receiving vessel	3
Pelagic squid jig	2
Experimental fishing permit	-
Hawaii	
Main Hawaiian Islands non-commercial bottomfish	-
Special coral reef ecosystem	-
Precious coral	1
Crustaceans	4 (1 lobster, 3 shrimp)
American Sāmoa	
Special coral reef ecosystem	-
Precious coral	1
Crustaceans	-
Mariana Islands	
Guam large vessel bottomfish	-
Northern Mariana Islands bottomfish	5
Special coral reef ecosystem	-

Permit	Number
Precious coral	-
Crustaceans	-
Pacific Remote Island Areas	
Pelagic Troll & Handline	1
Bottomfish	-
Special coral reef ecosystem	-
Precious Coral	-
Crustaceans	-
Marine National Monument	
Recreational Fishing	-
Recreational Charter	-