



Report of the Fishery Data Collection and Research Committee-Technical Committee Meeting

Tuesday, August 5, 2025
Webconference (via Webex)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Joshua DeMello, Council Staff, opened the meeting of the Fishery Data Collection and Research Committee-Technical Committee (FDCRC-TC) at 12:15 p.m. FDCRC-TC members in attendance included Domingo Ochavillo, Hongguang Ma, Jenny Suter, Justin Hospital, Tom Ogawa, Jay Gutierrez, and Jude Lizama.

Also in attendance was Felix Reyes, Angela Dela Cruz, Felix Reyes (Council Staff); and Marlowe Sabater (NMFS PIFSC)

2. Review of FDCRC Strategic Plan and SOPP

DeMello provided an overview of the FDCRC Strategic Plan and Standard Operating Procedure and Protocol (SOPP). FDCRC-TC members suggested adding WPacFIN specifically to its membership but PIFSC representatives noted that they will review membership and provide potential changes at a later date. Guam suggested that the University of Guam member be replaced with Dr. Brett Taylor or Dr. Peter Houk.

The FDCRC-TC discussed the need for the strategic plan to be at a higher level with a simplified approach that has redefined goals. Subcommittees could then work on specific strategies and tasks. The members agreed to review the strategic plan and provide comments by October 5.

3. PIFMAPS Action Items and Priorities Follow-up

Sabater presented on the Pacific Insular Fisheries Monitoring and Assessment Planning Summit (PIFMAPS) held August 19-23, 2016 at the Ala Moana Hotel in Hawaii. The goal of the workshops came from the strategic plan to conduct a review of the territorial data collection element to understand its role in the fishery management process. He provided a recap of the workshop and the discussion topics and an update on the status of the recommendations and outcomes. The panel recommendations included recommendations on statistical surveys, commercial and fisher reports, catch and calibration, biosampling, organization, and outreach. He said that only the biosampling recommendations were fully addressed while the other recommendations were partially addressed.

Hospital asked about the status of licensing and reporting in the territories. Sabater said CNMI has a complete suite of regulations that covers both the commercial dealers and fishers that is awaiting implementation. Gutierrez said that Guam is in the process of meeting with the community to develop its fishery management plan but licensing was brought up as an option. Ochavillo said that there needs to be discussion with the new director and NMFS regarding mandatory reporting for American Samoa.

Ma said that commercial license require a definition of commercial fishing and asked if it was defined in the territories. CNMI said that commercial fishing is defined as trade, barter or sale. American Samoa said they have mandatory reporting for commercial vendors. Guam said that if fish are sold, then its commercial, but they are also discussing definitions for cost recovery.

Sabater noted that the FDCRC should discuss “right sizing” the surveys. Where there is low effort and low participation, a random-stratified design might not be appropriate. If there is low participation, the likelihood of intercepting would be low as well. The FDCRC should discuss what is the right way to collect the data.

DeMello asked what the total number of fishers are in American Samoa. Ochavillo said there are seven alia and three to four bottomfish vessels with two to three fishers per boat. DeMello asked if they could talk directly to fishers. Ochavillo said that is something that DMWR and PIFSC are discussing.

DeMello asked about Rota and Tinian. Lizama said that there are only four dedicated bottomfish fishers and they are all coming into the same place so they could intercept them at those places instead of a random-sampling design.

Hospital said that PIFSC has conducted socioeconomic surveys in the region that have been successful and that the fishing communities are definitely open to participating in surveys but there needs to be ways to make it easy for them to participate.

Suter said that WPacFIN is working on modernizing the data collection with SellItLogIt replacing the commercial purchase database with a web-based application and working to make it available for the vendors to use rather than just the agencies. They are also working on making the CatchItLogIt available for fishers or agency staff to use and making a more modern creel data system. There are a lot of tech builds but it is a challenge to support all of this at once. Suter said that it is important to keep in mind that if we want modern systems there needs to be clear priorities with a timeline for rollout and calibration for WPacFIN support. She said that American Samoa and CNMI would be simpler to have logbooks instead of waiting around all day for someone to show up. She noted that the estimation of total catch and effort is sensitive with less data.

Ma said that American Samoa may be an example of how to combine census data with random-sampling survey information as that is how it is treated with Tutuila and Manua.

4. Annual SAFE Report Updates and Improvements

DeMello provided the recommendations and process for improving the Annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Reports. He said that the Plan Teams have a working group that is working on proposing changes to the Annual SAFE Reports and that they are reviewing the current modules to make recommendations on what content could be streamlined/modified/removed to more closely align with current requirements. The process will include developing a framework to standardize the fishery modules and explore approaches to incorporate economic information and fisher observations in the fishery performance modules.

Ochavillo noted that the Council's Status of the Fisheries report is something that the territories can use to provide information to the public. The fishery performance modules have a limited audience and there should be something more easily digestible for the public.

Suter noted that the changes being made are a slow process but whatever is decided needs to be mindful of what can be done within the timeframe. Simplification would be nice. She asked the agencies if they utilized data from the SAFE reports. Lizama said that recently, CNMI has used the data collected from the field rather than the expansions because the expansion inflates the perception of the fishery due to the inconsistency in sampling efforts. Ochavillo said American Samoa does not use it because the SAFE report has a very limited audience. He suggested that a simplified version would provide added value that could be distributed. Gutierrez said that Guam uses expansion data or information from the University of Guam.

5. Exploring Alternative Data Collection Methods

The FDCRC-TC discussed potential barriers to data collection. Members were curious about funding issues and how it may affect the current surveys. Suter noted that she didn't see any funding issues with the Fishery Information Network (FIN) funding.

Lizama said that a barrier to data collection is that the survey is not encountering bottomfish fishers (due to low numbers, timing, etc.) but those fish are captured in the commercial receipts. Delacruz noted that the same issue happens with spearfishers as they are difficult to intercept but their fish is recorded in the markets.

Suter asked if the CNMI creel survey has been working better in 2025. Lizama said that it started later than desired but said that after the last FDCRC meeting, they are getting the support of the leadership thanks to those FDCRC discussions.

The FDCRC-TC also discussed potential alternatives to the current data collection methods. DeMello noted the earlier discussions on the mandatory reporting options as well as right-sizing the data discussed in the previous sections.

Members pointed out that fishers are more likely to participate in surveys if their interaction time is minimized. They were interested in a technology that could use their existing survey tablets to take pictures of the catch and using software that could calculate length/weight and/or identify species. Surveyors often find themselves trying to minimize the inconvenience to the fishers and technology may be able to help expedite sampling. There were some concerns but members thought that having a fish mat available for fishers to take pictures of their own catch might be a way for fishers, who are competitive by nature, participate in the data collection.

Ma also noted that the Hawaii Marine Recreational Fishing Survey (HMRFS) had identified other data collection methods such as a roving creel survey design but found that some islands are too big to drive around and collect effort. He said that some of those ideas can be found in the regional implementation plan.

6. Inflation Reduction Act Projects

DeMello reported on the Council's projects developed under the Inflation Reduction Act funding provided to the councils to address climate change. He said the Council has four projects including scenario planning workshops for the longline fisheries; a review of the Council's regulatory regime to determine if the fisheries are climate-ready; a protected species project; and a project to engage the community on potential climate issues that may affect fisheries. He noted that many of these projects will require the assistance of the agencies and that contractors may be contacting some of the FDCRC-TC members as well.

7. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

8. Discussion and Recommendations

Regarding the SOPP and Strategic Plan:

- The FDCRC-TC agreed to review the strategic plan to provide comments by October 5, 2025. The FDCRC-TC recommended the FDCRC to consider moving towards making the strategic plan a higher-level document that deals with goals, objectives, and strategies, removing the lists of predefined tasks.
- The FDCRC-TC recommended the FDCRC change the University of Guam representative to Brett Taylor or Peter Houk. PIFSC will provide nominations for Council Family changes prior to the next Council meeting.

Regarding Annual SAFE Report Revamp:

- The FDCRC-TC recommended the FDCRC consider timelines required to develop new data systems when implementing new data collection and reporting improvements as they both involve a lot of development and coding time.

Regarding alternative data collection approaches:

- The FDCRC-TC recommended the FDCRC consider "right-sizing" the data collection efforts for those fisheries with low participation. Members noted that while the surveys may be designed properly, a low number of participants may mean fewer intercepts and less reliable estimates of total catch and effort via the expansion algorithms.
- The FDCRC-TC recommended the FDCRC consider conducting a full census of the boat-based fisheries that have low participation.
- The FDCRC-TC recommends the FDCRC continue to pursue mandatory licensing and reporting for all fisheries that would allow full census of catch.
- The FDCRC-TC expressed interest in developing electronic technologies that allow for fishers (or samplers) to collect catch, effort, length, and species composition data through an electronic reporting application paired with fish mats. This would minimize interaction with fishers and accelerate length measurements and species identification.

9. Other Business

Ma reminded the group that the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) is looking forward to the revised Pacific Islands Regional Implementation Plan (PIRIP). DeMello said that the PIRIP team will be reconvened this fall to continue working on revisions.

The meeting ended at 2:00 p.m.