



Report of the Fishery Data Collection and Research Committee Meeting

Wednesday, August 6, 2025

9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Council Office, Honolulu, Hawaii

1. Welcome and Introductions

Charles Littnan, PIFSC Director, opened the meeting as Chair of the Fishery Data Collection and Research Committee (FDCRC). Members in attendance included: Brian Nielson (HI DAR), Nate Ilaoa (DMWR), April Trinidad (Guam BSP), Ruth Utzurrum (USFWS), Michael Tenorio (CNMI DFW), and Kitty Simonds (WPRFMC).

Others in attendance included: Joshua DeMello, Mark Fitchett, Felix Penalosa, Felix Reyes, Angela Delacruz, Zach Yamada (Council staff); Marlowe Sabater, Becky Walker, Erin Bohaboy, and T. Todd Jones (NMFS PIFSC); Jarad Makaiau (NMFS PIRO); David Sakoda (DAR); Jude Lizama (CNMI DFW); Domingo Ochavillo (AS DMWR). Members of the public included Representative Trude Sunia from American Samoa.

2. Review of Agenda

The FDCRC Chair provided the agenda for review and asked for any changes. There were no changes to the agenda.

3. Review of FDCRC Strategic Plan and SOPP

A. Strategic Plan Review

Council Staff presented an overview of the FDCRC Strategic Plan.

The FDCRC discussed whether the plan was too complex. Members said that there may be too much in it while others noted that the strategic plan starts out well but gets too detailed that are difficult to work on as it starts to date itself. With changes in staffing positions and other issues, a lot of what is in the strategic plan will never get done.

Staff noted that many tasks are a wish list of projects and no one in particular is tasked with completing the project. Some of the projects do not necessarily need to be in there but there are some things that the agencies are working on that addresses the strategies but not included in this plan. He explained that the Technical Subcommittee (FDCRC-TC) suggested looking at only the strategies.

FDCRC members discussed the need to look at these strategies as an overall plan and put something together as an implementation plan that the Technical Subcommittee is able and willing to handle the details by working with the agencies.

The FDCRC also discussed the relevance of the strategic plan, given that the territories are working on their own fishery management plans (FMP). There may be a need to look at jurisdictional management for some of these strategies. A member said that the FMPs should be coordinated with the Council so that the two plans work in unison. Another member said that

this plan gives high-level jurisdiction because what is in one island area may not be the same in others. He said that is why the goals and priorities in this plan is good but at the task level, it needs to be looked at locally.

Members agreed to redo the strategic plan with definite goals to help the territories and to be aligned with their FMPs. *The FDCRC agreed to provide feedback on the existing plan and comments for the new plan by October 15.*

B. SOPP Review

Council staff presented the purpose and need for the FDCRC.

FDCRC members discussed whether there was any need for changes such as broadening or shrinking priorities and if the mission of the FDCRC had changed. A member noted the mechanisms in the territories have been helpful for getting information that is not collected through the federal permit and reporting systems. Other members noted the need to “right size” their investments and the potential for shifting federal management. This group provides opportunities to make sure that there is a good flow of information and a collaborative environment in order to effectively sustain fisheries.

A member noted the need to have conversations between PIFSC and other fishery agencies to discuss federal vs jurisdictional waters and using alternative approaches to move away from Annual Catch Limits. He suggested that the FDCRC can evolve to encompass these type of discussions. The FDCRC could also make recommendations to provide support and communication between agencies.

The FDCRC identified value in the work that is being done but there should be some narrowing of focus and evolution of the FDCRC. Members noted that it would be good for a conversation outside of this meeting on the SOPP with strong input from the Technical Committee on how this group might be refined with the overall question of is it useful how can it be refined. The priority is getting good information and having good data management.

C. FDCRC Technical Committee Recommendations

Council staff reported on the following recommendations from the FDCRC-TC meeting held on Tuesday, August 6:

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.

FDCRC members noted that the FDCRC-TC also agreed that the strategic plan should stop at strategies. The FDCRC discussed the need to complete the territorial FMPs by December 31, 2025 with implementation in January 2026. It will help the Council and FDCRC focus on addressing everything related to data and research needs.

4. Review of Pacific Insular Fisheries Monitoring and Assessment Planning Summit-PIFMAPS

A. Review of PIFMAPS Outcomes and Recommendations

Sabater provided a review of the Pacific Insular Fisheries Monitoring, Assessment and Planning Summit (PIFMAPS) held August 19-23, 2019.

The FDCRC noted that it has been six years since PIFMAPS. Some of the recommendations from the summit were worked on such as the increased collaboration between PIFSC and the territories. The current government issues with hiring, realignment, reduction, etc. has impacted the ability of PIFSC to work on more of the recommendations. Members noted the importance of maintaining consistency in the territories.

Members discussed CatchIt, LogIt (CILI) and SellIt, LogIt (SILI), noting that the original version of the apps were halted. Resources were put into the SILI and agencies are transitioning to using SILI with their vendors. CILI may be used for self-reporting with a potential use for census reporting but a newer version is being worked on to utilize updated technology. Member noted the issues with self-reporting when it isn't mandated. They still hope to use CILI to capture lengths and are looking to provide incentives such as a fishmat or ice to collect the length information. Another member noted that CILI wasn't given a proper push and the Council was there to support the agency to train fishermen but it was never given the opportunity to succeed.

5. Improving Annual SAFE Reports

Council staff reported on the Plan Team's efforts to revamp the Annual SAFE Reports. The Plan Team formed a working group to review the current modules, develop a standard framework for fishery modules, and explore approaches to incorporate economic information and fisher observations into the fishery modules. He said that the FDCRC-TC discussed whether the agencies needed this report for their own use/requirements and suggested that the separate modules could be pulled together for their own reporting. The FDCRC-TC suggested something more digestible would be better to provide to the public similar to what the Council does for the status of the fisheries.

FDCRC members discussed the deadline for recommendations for SAFE Report changes noting that April at the Plan Team meeting will be when it is taken up again. Members discussed that the recommendations are important and that the FDCRC should provide a review as well. American Samoa member said that his staff condensed the module into a one pager in order to provide it to the Governor and legislature. Hawaii member said that they put out an annual report but it doesn't have fisheries stats. The fisheries division has done its own annual report for the last five years but need to beef it up for fishers to see where the results of their data collection efforts. He said they are interested to learn how to improve and grow their reports.

An FDCRC member said that decision makers need this information but the SAFE Report provides everything to everyone and as a result isn't useful for anyone. There might be room for narrowing or reducing redundancy in the report. Another member noted that there isn't time to do different reports for everyone and there are requirements for the SAFE Report. A member suggested that there should be quarterly snapshots that are collected into the SAFE Report. All members agreed that there is a need to have something that the territories can use as well.

6. Data Collection

A. Barriers to Data Collection

American Samoa reported that in his discussions with NMFS PIFSC, they talked about potentially using more effective tools than the current creel survey. American Samoa has relatively few active vessels so a method that targets these boats might be better. He said they get reports of fishing on social media but get zero data so he is open to finding a better way to capture that data that doesn't require a person driving around the island on a regular basis. He suggested incentive-based methods, using fishing tournaments, or providing funding.

A Guam member reported that the vendors do not speak English so there is a need for translation services. The vendors are also concerned that data collection will be used for enforcement, taxes, etc. She also reported that the Memorandum of Agreements they have with restaurants always need to be re-negotiated when management changes.

B. Alternative Data Collection Methods

The FDCRC discussed alternative data collection methods including providing commercial receipt books for fishers to fill-out and using the Pacific Community (SPC) IkaSavea smartphone app. The IkaSavea app uses AI to determine species and size of a fish and PIFSC is looking into how it works. There were concerns about data ownership and members discussed the potential

of redirecting the data away from SPC and to another agency. Another idea is to utilize the code to develop something tailored to the Western Pacific region.

Another member discussed the possibility to move away from creel surveys to a census, or “right-sizing” the data collection. This would provide the agency to simplify surveys or move to sampling from every participant. The use of incentives for data collection can be used to increase participation and participating in community events may help to overcome barriers. Another member noted that while they cannot fund fishing derbies, they can fund the management of fish populations tied to data collection if the derby is a means to get at data collection.

7. Council Inflation Reduction Act Projects

Council staff provided an overview of the Council’s Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) that includes scenario planning, protected species workshops, regulatory review, and community engagement. Contractors are currently working to complete these projects by the end of 2026.

A member noted that fishers said that “fish are dying of old age” at a recent meeting. Another member added that looking at the commercial marine license holders and age, there are very few license holders in the younger age categories. The concerns about food security and the culture of fishing are important but could be lost if the fishing community starts to age out.

One FDCRC member noted that the first round of IRA project meetings was helpful and there was a lot of useful information from the community. He said he was excited about the vocational training project and looking to continue or expand this type of program in American Samoa after the project concludes.

The FDCRC discussed funding and if there was funding available for translation services. One member noted it depends what needs to be translated and should be related to meeting the regulation. A member asked if the use of sportfish funds could be used for the fishery management plan if it is for the recreational fisheries providing comments. USFWS member said that Guam is using some sportfish funds so the answer is yes if it helps with developing the recreational parts of the FMP.

8. Fishery Management Plan Development and Implementation

CNMI reported that their FMP is in draft form and that they have been working with NMFS PIFSC for guidance. He said that what is needed is a dedicated person to help keep everyone on track but due to the changes in the NMFS PIRO office, they are looking to get additional help from elsewhere.

NMFS PIRO noted that Sustainable Fisheries Division has taken over the assistance of FMP development in the territories and the Point of Contact for CNMI is Steve McKagan.

American Samoa reported that they have a draft that was kicked off over four years ago and is on track to be finished this year. It will include feedback from the IRA consultation meetings that noted the needs in infrastructure as well. He said that the alia fishery needs help to make repairs and some funds have been identified to do that.

Guam reported that they had two more townhall meetings scheduled, one in Malessa and another with the Micronesian community before the end of August. After which, the plan will be drafted and entered into the AAA process with a final community outreach and legislative public hearings before the end of the year.

Hawaii reported that it is using the Holomua process to focus on nearshore fisheries with Maui being used as the pilot island. They are currently putting together the island profile for Maui and pulling together all available data on fisheries, habitat, estuaries and anything informing the nearshore area. The Community planning process provided the management priorities for both regulatory and non-regulatory measures. He said that they are also in the pre-planning process for Hawaii Island and starting to gather information before launching Holomua there next spring.

9. Public Comment

Trude Ledoux-Sunia, American Samoa House of Representatives, Marine and Wildlife House Committee congratulated the American Samoa DMWR Director on filling the shoes of Taotasi Archie Soliai on the FDCRC. She said they recently held a House Hearing on deep sea mining and the work of the Council has helped to shape their recent resolutions with regard to seabed mining issues. She was sad to hear about the limited data from American Samoa fisheries as the data is important to make changes. There are only a few alia fishing but the interest for more people fishing is not there. She suggested looking at Manu'a as a place where the traditional fishing happens and said any assistance is always welcome. She said that the young people have great ideas and that she is ready to give a big push for data collection.

10. Discussion and Recommendations

The FDCRC made the following recommendations:

Regarding the SOPP and Strategic Plan:

- The FDCRC recommends the Council direct staff to work with agency members of the FDCRC to review the strategic plan to provide comments by October 5, 2025. The review may also consider moving towards making the strategic plan a higher-level document that deals with goals, objectives, and strategies.
- The FDCRC recommends the Council consider Council Family changes to replace Terry Donaldson with Brett Taylor as the University of Guam representative on the FDCRC-TC Research Panel. PIFSC will provide nominations for Council Family changes prior to the next Council meeting.

Regarding Annual SAFE Report Revamp:

- The FDCRC recommends the Council consider timelines required to develop new data systems when implementing new data collection protocols.

Regarding alternative data collection approaches:

- The FDCRC recommends the Council request PIFSC and the territorial agencies work together on “right-sizing” the data collection efforts for those fisheries with low participation such as a full census of the boat based fisheries and collecting additional length composition data from tournaments and derbies.

- The FDCRC recommends the Council work with the territorial agencies to continue pursuing mandatory license and reporting.
- The FDCRC recommends the Council work with PIFSC and the territorial agencies to address interest in developing electronic technologies that minimize the burden on fishers and maximize data collection, such as tablets, fishmats and cameras for length measurements, etc.
- The FDCRC recommends the Council work with PIFSC in coordinating with the Pacific Community (SPC) in scoping the feasibility of using the Ikasavea app to collect fishery dependent information in the US territories.

Regarding the Fishery Management Plan development and implementation:

- The FDCRC recommends the Council continue to encourage the territorial agencies to complete their respective territorial FMPs by the December 31, 2025

11. Other Business

There was no other business. The meeting ended at 12:51 p.m.