

AGENCY REPORT

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Department of Land and Natural Resources,
Division of Fish and Wildlife
September 16th– 17th, 2025

204th Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council Meeting

This report describes the activities undertaken by the Department of Land and Natural Resources regarding fisheries and conservation during the periods of **June 1, 2025–August 1, 2025**. The report covers Fisheries Monitoring and Research, Resource Protection and Enforcement, and Other Fishery Activities.

Fisheries Research and Monitoring (Fisheries Data Section)

Administrative and logistical challenges have been resolved, resulting in more boat-based surveys being completed and more commercial purchase reports being collected.

- a. Boat-based Creel Survey—9 surveys and 20 interviews were completed, 1 more survey and 12 more interviews than in the last period.
- b. Shore-based Creel Survey—20 surveys and 50 interviews were completed, 5 less surveys and 7 less interviews than in the last period.
- c. Commercial Purchase Reporting—183 purchase reports were recorded, 113 more than in the last period.

Other Fishery Activities

- a. FAD Program
 - Completed contract to deploy two FADs (DE & EE) in Rota waters, plans to deploy before September 2025 if weather permits
 - Two FADs (KK & LL) near Saipan were successfully deployed at the end of March 2025. Following the passage of several weather systems, an inspection revealed that FAD LL was no longer present. We plan to complete the deployment of the remaining 7 systems by the end of next fiscal year.
 - Inventory and procurement of FAD system hardware and equipment (chain, shackles, buoy, etc). This activity ensures that DFW has materials on hand to develop FAD systems as needed.
- b. Fish Life History Program
 - Lab work continues with in-house processing, including mounting grinding, and polishing to support accurate age estimation.
 - Approximately 140 otoliths were processed for age determination. The otoliths were mounted on glass slides, ground and polished. They were examined and aged for further analysis.
 - Approximately 160 gonad samples from coral reef fish and bottomfish species- including but not limited to *S. ghobban*, *K. cinerascens*, *C. trilobatus*, *C. argus*, *C. urodeta*, *P. auricilla*, *P. flavipinnis*- were assessed for sexual maturity and development.

- Preparations are underway to begin embedding and sectioning gonads, which may also provide hands-on training opportunities for interns in both reproductive and otolith processing techniques.
- c. Coral Reef Management Program
- Five (5) Baited Remote Underwater Video Survey (BRUVS) housing/frame were constructed and are undergoing performance testing. Initial pilot launch of the first BRUV successfully captured fish images.
 - Procurement issues continue to delay the acquisition of SfM (Structure-from-Motion) Workstation for processing images.
 - Metal flat bars and associated SfM markers are in the process of preparation and fabrication.
- d. Movement and Connectivity Program
- Net fishing has commenced, resulting in over 100 fish tagged across three netting events. DFW fisheries team has secured a permit to collect samples of these fish for the Platform grant's toxicology research. No recaptures have been recorded yet. Drag net fishing has increased our tagging rates, particularly among juveniles in shallower waters. As recapture data becomes available, we will be able to track movement patterns as the fish mature.
 - Collaborating with the community is essential to the project, as data collection depends on the fishers who catch tagged fish play a vital role in our data collection. To start off the summer, DFW fisheries staff visited fish tackle stores, fish vendors, and any store that may have fishers' visits and provided outreach and flyers on the project. DFW staff also completed outreach at AMP for Fisher's Recognition Week and have continued outreach efforts during fish derbies.
 - In total, we have tagged over 200 fish this year, and will continue to use the drag net throughout the next fiscal year and attend outreach events to connect with the community.
- e. Fishery Independent Surveys and Habitat Assessments
- DFW initiated several meetings with the CNMI Dive Safety Officer (DSO) and Dive Safety Control Board (DSCB) to help revitalize the CNMI dive program. Our efforts allowed us to regain dive reciprocity with NOAA.
 - The DFW team conducted 17 SCUBA surveys along Saipan lagoon's west-facing fore reefs at depths ranging from 6-18 meters.
 - The PL had the opportunity to join the NOAA CRED cruise and conducted an additional 28 surveys across other islands in the chain, including Guam, Tinian, Rota, Gagan, Alamagan, Agrihan, and Uracas.
 - The Coral Reef Ecologist is processing benthic photos from the 2024 lagoon surveys. We hope to bring in an NMC intern to help finish the work and gain valuable training using Coral Net software.
 - We will finish surveying the remaining sites around Saipan. Next year we plan to conduct SCUBA surveys on Rota and deploy deep-reef BRUVS.
 - We are finalizing a technical report from the FY23 lagoon surveys and

preparing a manuscript for peer-reviewed publication.

Boating Access Program

- a. Saipan facilities
 - Continued the Operation and Maintenance of the Smiling Cove Marina.
 - The contract process for the Marina Maintenance Dredging Feasibility Study is finally completed, pending the issuance of the NTP.
 - Continued meeting with stakeholders to conduct an emergency sand spit removal within the SCM channel. Meetings were held with collaborating entities to further address the overall erosion issues within the area of AMP.
- b. Tinian Marina
 - The NTP for the Tinian Marina Rehabilitation Project was issued. The fabrication of the docking system is ongoing and the delivery of the materials is projected for November of this year, as per the Contractor.
- c. Rota Marina
 - Continued the ground maintenance service for the Rota Marina Facility.
 - Continued to do repairs of the docking system when needed.

Enforcement Program

- a. Marine Protected Area
 - Approximately 14 patrols by enforcement officers using vessels and vehicles to monitor MPA boundaries and activities within them. These patrols can be scheduled or random to deter illegal activities.
 - Conduct public awareness campaigns targeting local communities, fishers, and tourists to educate the importance of MPAs, their regulations and the consequences of non-compliance. Staff participated in two community events, each event hosted approximately 200 participants.
- b. Fishing and Hunting Patrols
 - Conservation enforcement officers conduct routine patrols by vehicle, boat, and on foot to monitor fishing and hunting activities in designated areas. These patrols help ensure compliance with regulations related to seasons, bag limits, gear restrictions, and licensing.
 - Based on violation trends and public inputs, officers conduct targeted enforcement operations in areas known for illegal activity or during peak seasons.
 - Conducted patrol during nighttime hours, when some illegal hunting or fishing activities are more likely to occur.
 - Seize illegally obtained fish, game and equipment in the commissions of violations.
 - Coordinate with state and federal law enforcement agency to address violations that may cross jurisdictional boundaries or involve other criminal

activities

- Work closely with the Fish and Wildlife section to align enforcement efforts with conservation goals and management strategies.

c. ESA

- Conservation Enforcement Officers conduct land and marine patrols to monitor for activities that could harm endangered or threatened species or their habitat.
- Conduct inspection of domestic vessels, monitor cargo at docksides and inspect fishing markers and roadside vendors of evidence of ESA violations, such as the illegal take of sea turtles or other protected species.
- Joint patrols with NOAA OLE to monitor fishing activities and ensure compliance with regulations designed to protect listed marine species.
- Enforcement officers and other DFW staff conduct public outreach and education to raise awareness about endangered species and the importance of their protection.
- Enforcement efforts focus on preventing the illegal take of endangered sea turtles (like green and hawksbill turtles), marine mammals, and threatened coral species. This includes monitoring fishing activities, preventing illegal harvesting, and protecting nesting beaches and coral reefs.
- Activities that destroy or degrade the critical habitat of listed species, such as unpermitted coastal development or pollution, are also enforcement priorities.
- Approximately 9 dockside patrols and 5 sea patrols were conducted during this period.

d. Outreach and Education

- Conduct presentations and workshops for community groups, schools, and civic organizations on local conservation laws, the importance of protecting natural resources, and the role of enforcement. Tailor presentations to specific audiences.
- Outreach was conducted at three events, each event reached approximately 200 individuals.