WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

DRAFT AGENDA
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CNMI-Mariana Archipelago FEP Advisory Panel Meeting
Wednesday, September 3, 2025, 6:00 p.m. – 8 p.m. (ChST)
Hybrid Meeting via Webex

1. Welcome and Introductions

Richard Farrel, CNMI Advisory Panel (AP) Vice Chair, opened the meeting at 6:03 p.m. (ChST). CNMI AP members in attendance included Cecilio Raiukiulipiy, Ray Tebuteb, Anthony Guerrero, Dre Lizama. Lorna Iginoef, Lawrence Concepcion, Perry Mesngon and Lino Tenorio were absent.

Others in attendance include Zach Yamada, Angela Dela Cruz, Felix Reyes (Council Staff), Jude Lizama, Mike Tenorio (CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife), Clay Tam (Pacific Islands Fisheries Group) Adam Ayers and Mia Iwane (NOAA) and Craig Severance (SEEM working group).

2. Review of the Last AP Recommendation and Meeting

Angela Dela Cruz, Council staff, provided a status review of the recommendations from the last AP meeting held on May 28, 2025.

An AP member reported that they had contact with Jerome Ierome in American Samoa submitted a grant application to secure life rafts and EPIRBs for local fishers as part of their safety training initiatives. The AP suggested exploring whether a similar opportunity could be pursued for the Marianas and is committed to providing further details by email.

3. Council Fisheries Issues

A. SEEM Process Review Report

Craig Severance provided background on the Social, Economic, Ecological, and Management (SEEM) with the Social Science Planning Committee (SSPC) established a SEEM Review Working Group (SSPC-WG) to evaluate the current SEEM process used in setting annual catch limits (ACLs) across the Western Pacific Region. The review found that while the SEEM process has successfully fostered dialogue, trust, and community input, several challenges remain, including concerns about overlap with the P* process, the effectiveness of the scoring system, uneven community representation, and the time commitment required for participation.

Adam Ayers added that To address these issues, the SSPC-WG presented a suite of options aimed at preserving the strengths of SEEM while improving its efficiency and representativeness. Recommendations included refining SEEM outcomes, clarifying its implementation and trigger points, and strengthening community participation strategies. The report emphasized the importance of ensuring fishing community perspectives remain central to

the ACL-setting process and invited feedback from the SSPC, Council staff, and Advisory Panels before moving forward with refinements.

A brief review of the presentation from the previous informal meeting and summarized the feedback received. Key points included a request for the SEEM Working Group to communicate information in simpler terms, acknowledgment of eroded trust in the federal government, and the expressed need to conduct data workshops with fishing communities. Despite these concerns, participants affirmed that the SEEM process remains a valuable and worthwhile initiative.

The AP expressed a strong consensus on the importance of maximizing participation to strengthen the SEEM process and ensure robust input and data collection. Members discussed the potential value of hosting community workshops to gather broader feedback directly from local fishers. It was also emphasized that SEEM information, as well as fisheries data more generally, should be communicated in a clear and digestible manner. Participants agreed that these efforts would be an important step toward improving both data collection and fisheries management.

B. CNMI Bottomfish ACL Specifications for 2026-2029

Council staff, Angela Dela Cruz reported that the stock assessment applied forward projections using estimated posterior distributions of model parameters to evaluate future catch scenarios for CNMI bottomfish from 2026 to 2029. Annual catches ranging from 0 to 90,000 pounds were simulated in 1,000-pound increments, with each scenario assumed constant across the projection years. These simulations incorporated uncertainty in model estimates to calculate key outcomes, including the probability of overfishing (P*), stock biomass relative to sustainable levels (B/BMSY), harvest rate, and the probability of the stock becoming overfished (B/BMSY < 0.7). The catch level associated with a 50 percent probability of overfishing was identified as the overfishing limit (OFL), which then informed the development of catch specifications.

Based on these projections, four annual catch limit (ACL) options were offered for management consideration. Option 1 proposed no action, which would not comply with federal requirements. Option 2 maintained the status quo with an ACL of 82,000 pounds and an annual catch target (ACT) of 74,000 pounds, based on the 2019 assessment. Option 3, reflecting the 2025 stock assessment update, established an ACL of 72,000 pounds and an ACT of 66,000 pounds, corresponding to a 40 percent probability of overfishing with additional precaution from P* and SEEM reductions. Option 4 applied further precautionary buffers, offering reduced ACLs ranging from 69,000 to 59,000 pounds with corresponding ACTs from 63,000 to 53,000 pounds, lowering the probability of overfishing to between 38 and 25 percent. These options balance scientific guidance, precautionary management, and the practical realities of the CNMI bottomfish fishery.

An AP member emphasized the importance of improving communication between the Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) and local fishers, explaining that fishers must understand how their contributions help ensure accurate data collection. It was further noted there is a disconnect between fishers and DFW and stressed the need to select the appropriate management option for the next four years.

The Vice-Chair questioned whether the ACL and ACT will apply collectively across the three populated islands of the CNMI, Zach Yamada verified that it would. The Vice-Chair then inquired about island-specific breakdowns of data.

Mike Tenorio clarified that catch limits are based largely on Saipan market landings but acknowledged that Tinian and Rota contribute as well. Jude Lizama explained that while data collection captures trips departing and returning to Saipan, catches from Tinian and Rota are often not included.

AN AP member expressed concern that contracted biosampling efforts exclude overnight catch, which results in underrepresentation of Tinian and Rota. Tenorio responded that the restriction is to preserve biological samples, while Lizama added that catches from the Northern Islands and Rota are not fully reflected in CNMI reporting. The Vice-Chair also asked whether certain catches would be attributed to Guam or CNMI ACLs.

The preferred management option from the AP voiced to support Option 3 to act as a buffer moving into the next term.

4. Council IRA Project Discussions

A. Scenario Planning

Zach Yamada, Council staff, provided an update on the Council's IRA scenario planning project. The goal of the Scenario Planning Project is to identify and develop adaptive fishery management strategies that support resilient and productive fisheries in the region. Two scenario planning efforts will be conducted, one of the Hawaii and American Samoa longline fisheries, and another for the small-boat fisheries across the region. Currently, the Scenario Planning project has consulted with its Steering Committees to develop materials for anticipated workshops in November 2025. Project themes that are affecting future scenarios include: 1) climate change and changes to the natural environment, including distribution of fishery resources, 2) changes in political and governance affecting fishery management, 3) markets, 4) availability and development of fishery sector labor, 5) infrastructure changes, and 6) supplies to sustaining the fisheries.

An AP member expressed hope that some longline operations might relocate to the CNMI, noting the territory's struggling economy and its proximity to major Asian markets.

B. Regulatory Review

Zack Yamada stated that a regulatory review is currently underway, building on discussions held earlier in the year, including those in February. The purpose of the review is to evaluate existing regulations to determine which measures are effective, which may be inadequate, and what additional measures may be necessary to address future scenarios, including the impacts of climate change. As part of this process, federal regulations are being cross-checked against state regulations to identify areas of overlap or redundancy and to determine what provisions may be

considered for removal. One example highlighted was bottomfish reporting requirements, which exist at both the federal and state levels. Consideration is also being given to electronic monitoring (EM) and other electronic technologies, with a focus on whether current systems are sufficient to meet future needs. Advisory Panel members were encouraged to reflect on these issues and provide input on potential regulatory changes that may be required.

An AP member noted that he is currently reviewing regulations and will make recommendations in the future.

C. Protected Species

Asuka Ishizaki reported that the summer commenced with the onboarding of contractors, with the primary objective of convening two workshops aimed at improving the management of protected species in the region, particularly with a view toward future planning. The first workshop focused on assessing current and projected species distributions and interactions. Preliminary observations suggest that protected species interactions are increasing, likely due to growing populations and potential ecosystem changes. The workshop sought to better understand these trends and consider how they can be incorporated into management approaches, including evaluating increases and disentangling contributing factors. It was noted that some analyses may require data and expertise beyond the Council's existing processes.

The second workshop will expand the focus to consider broader protected species concerns and additional species to address regional protected species issues comprehensively. Planning for this workshop is scheduled in the coming months, with engagement opportunities as the scope is refined.

An AP member discussed outreach opportunities associated with the workshops like creating posters and short articles for students to increase awareness of protected species. It was noted that while the ongoing work under the IRA project is primarily governance-focused and may not directly align with outreach objectives, there remain opportunities to integrate education and outreach through other channels.

D. Community Consultation/Vocation Training

Zach Yamada provided an overview of the expected timeline for the second round of public meetings and progress on the fisher vocational training program. The Advisory Panel was invited to provide feedback on preferred times and locations for the upcoming meetings.

It was noted that the first round of meetings occurred in March, with the next round anticipated in late September. Plans are being considered to begin in Guam and then proceed to the CNMI. In addition, several surveys may be conducted in conjunction with the meetings.

Regarding the fisher vocational training program, Clay Tam reported that six participants are currently enrolled in training sessions being held in Hawai‘i. Out of 50 applicants, only six could be accommodated due to limited funding, highlighting strong interest and demand for the program. The initiative is intended to support the continuation of fishing traditions for the next

generation, and feedback from participants will be valuable in assessing outcomes. If successful, opportunities to secure additional funding may be pursued to expand future training.

AP members emphasized the importance of engaging with fishers directly, particularly during local derbies. It was suggested that scheduling visits during these events would provide an opportunity to connect with fishers and gain insight into community perspectives.

5. Advisory Panel Strategic Planning for 2025

The Vice-Chair discussed the AP Plan for 2025.

In regard to community tournaments on Tinian, it was reported that several fishing tournaments have been canceled, limiting opportunities for outreach. Recent community events such as the San Jose Fiesta, Pika Fest, and Beers and Bands have taken place, but few formal derbies have been organized. Instead, smaller tournaments have recently been coordinated by individual fishers, primarily for community participation. These events were described as informal gatherings where participants contributed their own funds.

In terms of data collection, it was noted that the most recent tournament did not formally submit data, although weights of the winning fish were recorded. Members emphasized the importance of improving data collection at these community-level events to increase their usefulness for management purposes.

In regard to military expansion, a significant concern raised by fishers relates to the proposed military expansion on Tinian. Community members expressed that they had already ceded access to Farallon de Medinilla (FDM) and are now being asked to give up additional fishing areas at North Point on Tinian, while military activities are already established in Guam. Members stressed that fishers need to retain sufficient access to traditional fishing grounds and that this issue warrants further attention and discussion.

6. Other Business

A. Fisheries Dependent-Data Collection in the CNMI

Jude Lizama provided a presentation on dependent-data collection in the CNMI. Data sources included creel surveys for boat-based and shore-based, as well as commercial reporting records dating back to 1983. Data methodologies were updated in 2025, with dedicated sections for each survey type. The primary objective of these efforts is to produce a representative snapshot of the fishery, capturing the diversity of fishing methods and the ways they contribute to the overall fishery.

Data collection relies on random sampling, supported by a random scheduling system. For the shore-base creel survey, a 12-hour survey is conducted, while the boat-based surveys span 16 hours. Although the sampling is random, the survey design ensures representative coverage. Data are collected through hand surveys, transcribed into software systems, and expanded through WPacFIN analyses. The Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) emphasized that accurate data

must be collected through direct field observation, noting that pelagic fisheries are relatively well covered, whereas bottomfish surveys may capture only a few fishers each month.

Regarding commercial data, a harvester report has not yet been implemented, though the model mirrors Hawai‘i’s system. Since 1983, commercial purchase data have been collected through receipts, which are required from any entity purchasing fish for resale. These forms are distributed and collected by DFW. Overall, the fishing community has provided valuable contributions to the dataset.

Advisory Panel members expressed appreciation for the historical scope of the data and highlighted the importance of accurate reporting. Some members voiced strong support for mandatory commercial reporting, noting the low number of bottomfish reports submitted under the current system. Suggestions included using boat registration information to identify vessel owners and encourage compliance. Members agreed that robust, locally managed data collection is essential to understanding and protecting fishery resources.

Concerns were also raised about fisher participation and willingness to share information, recalling past reluctance when data collection was conducted at the docks. It was suggested that mandatory reporting may help address these gaps and provide a clearer picture of the fisheries. Several members emphasized the need to align scientific data with community knowledge, particularly regarding species spawning cycles and sustainable harvest practices.

Questions were raised about how fish markets on Tinian could contribute data, with clarification provided that markets are required to complete purchase reports. Forms can be distributed by DFW to facilitate compliance.

7. Public Comment

Mia Iwane reported that the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) is preparing to launch a social science initiative focused on the Fish Flow Project in the CNMI. The project is currently in the data review stage. While the recent small boat data collected this year will not be included in the initial phase, as it still requires analysis, the project is expected to provide valuable insights and create future opportunities for discussion.

8. Discussion and Recommendations

Regarding data collection, *the CNMI AP recommends the Council request DFW to conduct education and outreach on the importance of license and reporting to better understand fishery performance.*

Regarding the CNMI Bottomfish ACL Specifications, *the CNMI AP recommends the Council take initial action on Option 3 to specify ACLs,ACTs and AMs for 2026-2029, utilizing the results of the P* and SEEM analysis based on the 2025 stock assessment update.*