



Report for the Mariana Archipelago FEP Guam Advisory Panel Meeting

Saturday, December 6, 2025, 10:05 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. (ChST)

Hybrid Meeting via Webex

1. Welcome and Introductions

Clay Tam, Advisory Panel (AP Chair), opened the meeting at 10:07 a.m. (ChST), Guam AP Members in attendance: Audrey Toves, Michael Gawel, Michael Dueñas, Carl Dela Cruz, Jason Miller and James Borja. Dale Alvarez and Dominik San Gil were excused.

Others in attendance included Joshua DeMello, Zach Yamada, Asuka Ishizaki, Mark Fitchett, Felix Reyes (Council Staff), Justin Hospital, Danika Kleiber (NOAA PIFSC), Izzic Cabrera (Capacity Building Training participant), and Thomas Remington (Lynker).

2. Review of the Last AP Recommendation and Meeting

Council staff Felix Reyes reported the Guam AP did not have any recommendations at its September 6, 2025, meeting.

3. Council Fisheries Issues

a. Options for Commercial Fishing in the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument

Joshua DeMello provided an overview on options to restore commercial fishing in marine national monuments in the Pacific. On April 17, 2025, President Trump issued Executive Order 14276, “Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness,” which directed the Secretaries of Commerce and the Interior to review existing restrictions on commercial fishing in marine national monuments and other federally protected marine areas. The order called for recommendations to promote sustainable U.S. seafood production while maintaining conservation objectives. In response, at its 204th Meeting in September 2025, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council endorsed a letter to the Secretary of Commerce providing an analysis and recommendations in accordance with Section 4(h) of EO 14276. The Council also directed staff to initiate an analysis of options to remove commercial fishing prohibitions and evaluate potential impacts to resources in the remaining marine national monuments should the Administration remove the fishing prohibitions. In order to prepare for a potential decision on commercial fishing in the marine national monuments, the Council, at its 205th meeting, may recommend revising fishing regulations in the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument (MNM), Papahānaumokuākea MNM, and Mariana Trench MNM in order to expedite the process. The Council will review options that may include 1) No Action - Do not remove commercial fishing prohibitions; 2) Restore commercial fishing by removing existing prohibitions; or 3) Revising existing fisheries management measures to restore commercial fishing and include new or additional measures.

An AP member said that in the 1980s, he worked on protected species regulations, with a focus on the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. He noticed that the kind of lobster fishing there does not occur in the Mariana Islands. If we were to draft regulations for crustacean fishing, we should not copy Hawai'i's regulations; instead, we should be guided by them.

Another AP member said that regarding the Northern Mariana Islands, he has never seen a full-scale commercial fishing. All are small boat-based that travel to the Northern Islands. When the Marianas Trench MNM was imposed, fishing was restricted. He does not foresee some type of commercial fishing but rather more towards mining rather than fishing.

An AP member said that it has been almost three years since any commercial fishing was done. There is a possibility of opening with some fishers doing that type of fishing. She likes the idea of opening up and maybe creating new regulations.

Another AP member said that at one time, there was interest in shark fishing in the Northern Mariana Islands where there are sharks. What is not known is if the U.S. is allowing the catch of sharks and if it is possible for a shark fishery because of the outside interest.

4. Council IRA Project Discussions

a. Scenario Planning

Zach Yamada, Council staff, reported the scenario planning was to identify and develop adaptive fisheries management strategies going forward. Project teams are looking at future scenarios like climate change and changes to the natural environment disturbance of fishery resources, changes in political and governance affecting fishery management and markets viability, and development of fisheries sector labor and infrastructure as they apply to sustaining fisheries.

The first phase is on the big boats who had their first meeting in American Samoa in November. They met with the port and the cannery where they talked about the challenges operating in American Samoa, with the longline fishery there struggling a little. A second round of meetings is planned during 2026 there and in Hawai'i. In terms of small boats, which is a key priority, the planning phases for 2026 is being worked on.

b. Regulatory Review

Thomas Remington, Council contractor, provided an update on the Council's IRA regulatory review project. The purpose of this project is to review the FEPs, federal regulations, state/territory regulations, and executive orders or other guidance to determine potential gaps or misalignments, eliminate redundant or unnecessary regulations, and recommend ways to make the FEPs more flexible/adaptable for efficient management in the future. At the upcoming Council meeting, the contractor team will present an initial analytical report reviewing the landscape of the current FEPs and regulations, identify some gap areas, outline some possible future scenarios that could cause problems in the current system (e.g., climate events shifting stocks to new areas), and prioritize issues uncovered.

In 2026, the contractor team will visit each jurisdiction twice to meet with local agencies and communities to identify additional issues and concerns related to local and federal regulations and management provisions. The team will be in Hawaii and American Samoa in late spring/early summer. The second round of meetings will be held in the September to November timeframe.

c. Protected Species

Thomas Remington, Council contractor, provided an update on the IRA Protected Species Project. The purpose of the workshop was to improve our understanding of how the ecosystem affects protected species distribution in the context of longline fisheries, with the goal of exploring alternative management strategies for the future. The workshop was postponed due to the government shutdown prohibiting participation from our NOAA partners, and we felt federal employee participation was meaningful. The workshop has been rescheduled to the first week in February 2026, barring another government shutdown at the end of January.

An AP member said the regulatory review project should consider endangered species like giant clams and turtles in the Mariana Islands. There should be consideration for traditional uses and for allowing some stock harvest.

d. Community Consultation

Alex Min, PIFG, provided a short presentation on the IRA community engagement and capacity-building work conducted throughout 2025. The project focuses on recording community observations about climate-change impacts and identifying needs for climate-resilient fisheries, as well as implementing a pilot fishery training program that was completed in September. In the second round of community consultation meetings, regional feedback heard during the IRA meetings, including changing ocean conditions, more severe storms, shifting seasonal patterns, difficulties with bait replacement in outer islands, increased shark depredation, and rising shark aggressiveness across several locations. The second round of IRA meetings moved from documenting issues to working with communities to identify practical solutions. Examples from Manu'a included challenges with boat ramps and fishing infrastructure. PIFG staff also shared updates from the vocational training program participants and described the shark depredation research project underway across the region, which documents traditional knowledge, fisher experiences, and mitigation practices. A final output will be published in March 2026.

Vocation Training participant Izzic Cabrera reported on his experience and take-aways from his training in Honolulu. He said he had a great experience. The training focused on various commercial fishing methods, including longline, deep-bottom fishing, and ama ebi (shrimp). They visited fisheries-related facilities and networked with industry professionals. In Guam, commercial fishing is almost non-existent. There is a possibility for commercial fishing in Guam, such as commercial shortline fishing and deepwater shrimp fishing with the right resources and personnel. He had the opportunity to explore many companies involved in fish auctions and longline fishing. It was mind-opening, especially on how well they take care of fish that is sold to the islands in Hawai'i. The Fresh Island Fish exports more than half of its catch to the U.S. and local consumers, which Guam can support. Commercial fishing has the possibility of opening up with the right permits; it is an avenue for Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands to explore to help the local economy with jobs, or provide fresh local fish. Most seafood and fish is imported into the Marianas. Almost an insult just because we live on an island dependent on the ocean. Opening a small operation for locally caught fish would be a great idea. The training program was a success and should go on for future generations. Guam's fisheries are dying out. This pilot program could attract more people and educate them about fishing and what is allowed on Guam. After every trip, the team gathered at the hotel and discussed what they went through, and what was needed to make things happen.

An AP member said he was glad Izzic was a part of the program and was willing to share the knowledge with the island. He thanked PIFG and all partners involved. Alternative fishing is on everyone's mind. Exploratory fishing is burdensome for many people. Seeing that this works and bringing it back will help.

An AP member said that it was an excellent opportunity to be a part of the first vocational training. It is true that Guam has few young fishers. For us to practice our culture and traditions and encourage youth, this will be an excellent opportunity to support them. There are a lot of benefits, knowledge and skills learned that can be applied to the islands. Many young fishers are more focused on numbers than on exploring less-frequented areas. This program should continue.

Another AP member said this was a great program and a good way to share knowledge on different fishing practices. It must start with a new generation and explore new ways of fishing.

5. MSRA Review

Mark Fitchett, Council staff, provided an overview of the updated 2025–2029 MSRA Research Priorities, explaining that the Council and SSC are required to set multi-year research priorities to guide NMFS planning and budgeting. The new priorities were developed through a workshop with PIFSC and were reviewed by APs, plan teams, and the Council before finalization. The priorities are organized around the Council's program themes, including climate adaptation, fishery competitiveness, emerging technologies, community resilience, and fishery development. Key research needs highlighted for the region include improving stock assessments and life-history data, evaluating the effects of large marine protected areas, reducing longline depredation, enhancing island fisheries data collection, addressing protected-species interactions, and strengthening socioeconomic and cultural research to support ecosystem-based management.

An AP member said there could be studies on the increasing impacts of military closures in Guam on some of our fishing areas and on the cost to our fisheries. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) will be doing an impact study on deep-sea mining and wonders if the Council has any thoughts on the matter.

Council staff said any problems affecting folks in Guam can be included in some of the research in the 5-year plan. Regarding deep-sea mining, it is an evolving process and something the federal partners and local agencies should be involved with.

6. Guam Territorial Fishery Management Plan

An AP member said the plan's draft is being circulated within DAWR. There is a meeting on December 12 to review recommended edits. The plan document is 43 pages, outside any edits. It is very comprehensive and will cover Guam fisheries profile, management measures, compliance and enforcement and adaptive management. The draft can be shared after the December 12 meeting. Thereafter, the document will go to the Administrative Adjudication Act process and to the community again for another round of reviews and comments.

7. Advisory Panel Strategic Planning for 2025/2026

Felix Reyes, Council staff, provided an update on the AP action plan. The AP supported the Council's Speaker's Bureau during 2025 and plan to go into the classroom even more during 2025. The AP supported all the meetings of the Council's Military Buildup Working Group and even joined a tour of all marinas hosted by the Port Authority of Guam. The AP supported the 2025 Guam Safe Boating Week activities held at the Micronesia Mall. The AP assisted with distributing Council-printed materials and information about the Council's mission in Guam. The AP plans to work with DAWR to select a territorial fish. They plan to work on outreach with local schools and the community in the selection process. The AP supported the 1st Annual Cocos Lagoon Mentored Boat-based Kid's Mafute Fishing Derby and plans to continue support of this event during 2026 when scheduled. The AP assisted the drafting of the 2025 and 2026 Lunar Calendar, with content and photos. The AP plans to support the Council's Marianas meetings in March 2026, including with logistics, regional ecosystem advisory committee, Fishers Forum, and IRA community meetings.

8. Other Business

An AP member said the deep sea mining request for information (RFI) through BOEM, there are a lot of concerns. There is great potential after many years of studying deep sea mining within their exclusive economic zone to be developed across and next to the MTMNM. Many other countries are looking at the International Sea Bed Authority for contracts. We have better resources but there are a lot of unknowns on impacts should these areas be explored. The question for us in the AP is what it will do for our fisheries and what benefits there are. Impacts are unknown and things are moving quickly. The Northern Mariana Islands and Guam Governments have been discussing this matter.

An AP member said that since this is just an RFI, they should let it run its course and see what types of methods will be used. Some are environmentally sound. It is nice to know what resources we have and can be extracted safely and not affect our fisheries. If any of that economic benefit can trickle to us it will be good. If we can get ahead of the game and pre-empt or exempt the more hazardous technologies being proposed it will be best for all of us.

Another AP member said there was a proposal to mine manganese between Hawai'i and American Samoa. In American Samoa, the company doing the exploration is offering 1% of profits to the territory. That is not much of an economic benefit. He is concerned that the process they took seems rushed.

An AP member said the Piti Village and its mayor are putting together an ocean festival called I Rikesan i Tasi (The Riches of the Sea) during April 18-19, 2026. The event will include honoring traditional practices like canoe building, navigation and fishing. It will also focus on engaging the youth and families through ocean-themed learning activities, promote environmental responsibility with hands-on stewardship activities, and build community connections through competitions, cultural performances, and village pride. There will also be a cultural demonstration village, environmental learning stations, model canoe design challenge, model canoe races, paddling competition, and a kelaguen competition. He proposed a fisherman's swapmeet similar to one held in Guam years ago.

An AP member said that DAWR, in partnership with the Piti Mayor for this event, are hosting the 1st annual fishing casting, accuracy, relay, talaya casting accuracy competition. He

asked if the AP can help DAWR with the events. It is for all ages, including adults and would like to start having meetings with the AP to discuss further.

An AP member said she would like to get a copy of the Port Authority Master Plan. There has been movement with marina lighting. The port installed solar lights around the dry dock area, at the south end and near the launch ramp and installed a container office for them to monitor activities.

9. Public Comment

Michael Duenas, Guam fisher, said that as a member of the fishing community, this is something he has been thinking about and has not been sitting well with him regarding our coastal communities and cultural identities of our islands. Across the nations and in our territories, there are countless grants from small backyard grower that USDA provides programs for farmers because agriculture has long been recognized. But when we look at support for fishers, there is no equivalent. No department of fisheries that provides funding. No funds for docks. Instead most funds go to NOAA and NMFS. Individual fishers do not see any benefits. Does not mean fishers are less important. Our small boat fishers feed families, support the community, preserve culture and contribute to the economy. There are no programs designed for their day to day needs. Fishing is treated primarily as a resource to manage. Fishers have been left out of many funding structures. This does not reflect reality or the resources of the men and women that depend on them. And it does not reflect the culture and island life. There is a need for conversation on fairness, recognizing fishing the same way agriculture is recognized as a vital way for security and cultural survival. Funding for gear, fuel, cold storage, fishing gear or even direct support. These ideas are possible but will not happen unless we stand together. We need to speak with one voice. I do not have a solution but would like us to find one. He thanked Izzik Cabrera for participating in the vocational training project. He saw a news article on how successful the feeding frenzy in Hawai'i was of 23 boats that donated 4,000 pounds of fish to feed the community in one day. That is 4,000 meals. How many meals are being supplemented daily when fishers go out. We are not being treated fairly. We have the whole world stacked against us. We need to be treated just as farmers are. We provide food as do the farmers.

The AP Chair said that while on MAFAC, he served on 5 committees. The sentiment is that our fisheries need to be looked forward to and funded. No subsidies for fuel, and other related expenses. Prices go up, things change. Alex Min was one of the folks that joined a couple of entities to feed the community. They developed a food distribution system for federal friends. Fisheries are not treated equally across all levels, from agencies to the top. All need to come together. Even in cooperative fisheries research, we were one of only two to complete our project during COVID. During the government shutdown, we completed 460+ grids unpaid. Standing tall is important. Especially for our island communities. Statistics that show how much fishers feed the communities is important. A lot is not reported. During 2020-2021, bottom fish dipped, not because fishers were not catching fish but because they were feeding.

An AP member agreed, noting that it has been happening for a long time. Unfortunately, it has come down to this. We cannot get together with the government. We should get recognized. Those gray areas and the dip where fish were given out should be considered. If I had fish and an opportunity to give away catch rather than the customer, I would give. We do not have grant opportunities as farmers do. During COVID, farmers were allotted a big budget, while fishers only had a one-time payout.

An AP member said it has been 23 years since he obtained his boat through a Guam Economic Development Authority (GEDA) loan for farmers and fishers. He said he went through a lot just to get funding to purchase his \$45,000 boat. He even had to go out for additional funds. And he still had to catch fish and pay for expenses and then sell the fish. After 23 years, he has always been in the red. Unless there is a big market, costs will outweigh profits. When typhoons come, we cannot fish or sell our catch. The reporting requirements are another thing. For 10 consecutive years, he was required to provide a financial statement to GEDA. He was 29 at the time, had just started his career, and needed to find another funding source. He sells fish to help subsidize his full-time job. He has never seen a full-time commercial fisherman in Guam. We do not get the handouts. He fishes because it has been his lifestyle since he was 3 years old. Recently, pesticides were found in the wells, and for months, they were not shared with the community. They could not figure out who was responsible. It affected the community's health. We always get the short end of the stick.

An AP said he worked on fisheries development in the other islands and knew that fuel costs in Guam were high and made it hard to keep operations going. Our local governments in Guam and CNMI can afford something like this to support fisheries.

The AP Chair said the small boat fishery in the region is totally ignored because it is not in the Federal Registry. All regulations apply. He supports our local communities with most of the fleet under 30-35 feet. Now, we are ignored. It is the same in Alaska and other artisanal fisheries. Fishing is the backbone of our communities.

Council staff said the comment period for the Executive Order for fishing in the monuments is open until December 15, 2025. The things brought up in this meeting are probably things that should be told to the President and Secretary of Commerce. These are things they are looking for to remove barriers. Maybe we can then start seeing some of these come down to us.

Justin Hospital, NOAA/PIFSC, reported on the March - September 2025 recently completed 2025 Marianas Small Boat Socioeconomic Survey. The survey's objectives included to understand the current economics of small boat fishing in the Marianas, document social and cultural benefits of fishing, including fish flow and local food security, and Update baselines from previous surveys conducted in 2011 and 2018. They received 160 responses from Guam, 66 responses from Saipan, 17 responses from Tinian, and 32 responses from Rota. Preliminary results distribution is planned for Spring 2026.

10. Discussion and Recommendations

The Guam AP recommends the Council restore commercial fishing in the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument. The AP notes that the regulations currently in place are based on Hawaii's fisheries and that the Council should potentially tailor the existing regulations to the Marianas fisheries after restoration.

Regarding the Guam reef fish FMP, the AP recommends the Council work with Guam DAWR to provide assistance to review the data and reports produced by the University of Guam Marine Lab (e.g. review by the SSC) that informs the draft territorial reef fish FMP.

Council staff Asuka Ishizaki asked AP member and DAWR Fisheries Supervisor Michael Dueñas if DAWR can convene a group to review this FMP recommendation matter.

Dueñas replied that he would like the DAWR to consider both. So No, DAWR cannot convene a group. He would like the University of Guam report to be reviewed by an entity other than DAWR. There are 28 species in the plan and it . looks like they cherry-picked information and chose different time periods for different species and this raises a red flag. He wants to see if the SSC concurs with the report's conclusion.

Ishizaki said that because this is a territorial plan, and the SSC is the Council's SSC, this for discussion can be taken up with the Executive Director and others before it goes before the Council. Because if it is presented before the SSC, it becomes a Council matter discussed by the Council.

Meeting adjourned at 2:24 p.m. (HST).
12:24 p.m. ChST