



Tuna Fishing in Monument Waters is Not Destructive

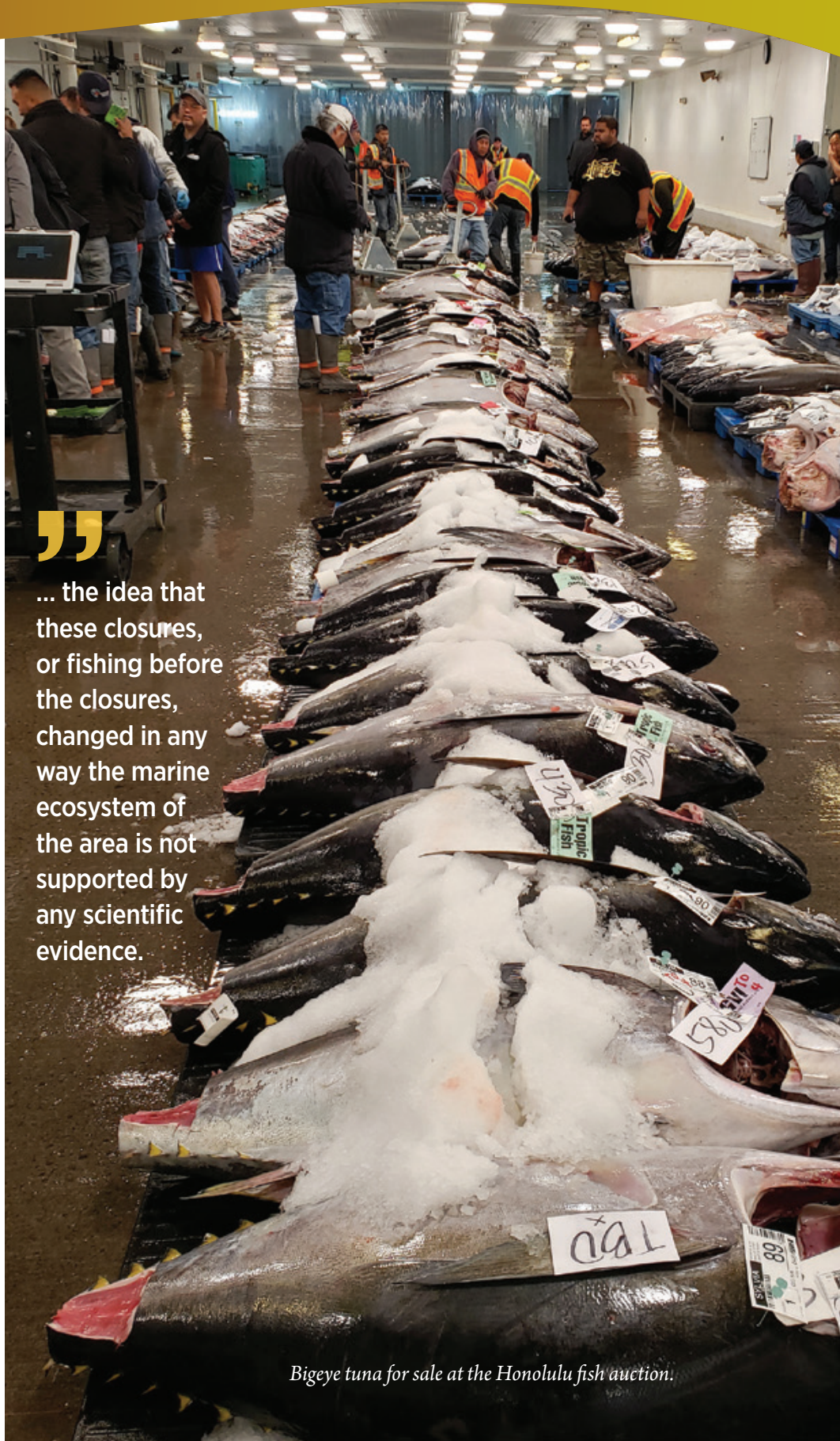


Guest article by Dr. Ray Hilborn, professor at the University of Washington's School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences, and member of the Science and Statistics Committee of the Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council. This Editorial was originally published in the Honolulu Star-Advertiser Aug. 17, 2025.

It is overly concerning that the Star-Advertiser's coverage of the Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument (PIHMNM) opening to commercial fishing and recent court decision repeats distortions made by environmental groups that fishing in those areas is "destructive."

Purse seining and longlining for tuna are the only kinds of commercial fishing that would occur in the opened areas of the PIHMNM from 50 nautical miles to 200 nautical miles, where there are no coral reefs, and the depth of the ocean is thousands of feet deep. Operationally, this fishing gear does not contact bottom

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... the idea that these closures, or fishing before the closures, changed in any way the marine ecosystem of the area is not supported by any scientific evidence.

Bigeye tuna for sale at the Honolulu fish auction.

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Tuna Fishing is Not Destructive

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substrate. Independent scientific evaluations by the Monterey Bay Aquarium and Marine Stewardship Council have rated U.S. fleets using these types of gear as sustainable. The idea that the National Marine Fisheries Service should ban these highly monitored fisheries runs counter to U.S. law and objectives for sustainable seafood production. Currently, about 90% of seafood consumed in the USA is imported from foreign nations with much lower environmental standards for their fishing fleets.

The expansion of these monument waters in 2014 had no scientific justification — rather it satisfied a political environmental agenda. Tuna do not stay put, but are always on the move, in and out of these areas often enough that there is no reason to expect that there would be more of them inside because of any closure. A 2023 study of the impact of the immense Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA) in Kiribati corroborated this understanding, and the Kiribati government has reopened the area to fishing.

When the area from 50 nautical miles to 200 nautical miles around 3 out of 5 islands of PIHMNM was opened in April, Hawaii-based vessels that fished around Johnston Atoll reported no greater catches of tuna or other species than elsewhere. This is not surprising; rigorous stock assessments indicate that all commercially fished tuna stocks in the Pacific Ocean are currently assessed to be in good condition. Moreover, the idea that these closures, or fishing before the closures, changed in any way the marine ecosystem of the area is not supported by any scientific evidence.

A study published this year also found no difference in the abundance of tunas inside and outside monument waters around Palmyra. Thus, despite the unsupported claims that the expanded monument areas are “protecting” a fragile marine ecosystem and producing “spillover,” the main effect the closures have had is to exclude U.S. fishermen from U.S. waters and forcing them to compete with foreign fleets on the high seas. And now there are calls within the conservation community to close all of the high-seas areas to fishing. In that case, and assuming the expanded Monument area remains closed, there would be almost no place in the Pacific for U.S. tuna

fleets to fish, except in other nations’ waters — much too distant for the Hawaii-based longline fleet. As the Hawaii longline fleet is a major food producer in the state, this jeopardizes Hawaii food security and self-sufficiency objectives.


The U.S. has a fisheries management system that prevents overfishing and protects marine species through a wide range of laws including the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Marine Mammal Protection Act, among others. The politically motivated monument expansions were done by executive fiat with no scientific evaluation and centered on advocacy that closures of huge areas of blue water are necessary for marine protection. Science and our understanding of marine ecosystems and the biodiversity therein tells us otherwise. ➡

Court Ruling on Monument Fishing: Setting the Record Straight

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council’s mission is to ensure that Pacific fisheries are managed responsibly — balancing sustainable harvest, cultural traditions and livelihoods, and protection of unique marine ecosystems.

On April 17, 2025, President Donald Trump issued Proclamation 10918, directing that certain monument waters — between 50 and 200 nautical miles (nm) from Wake Island, Jarvis Island and Johnston Atoll — be reopened to appropriately managed commercial fishing. On April 25, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) sent a letter to permit holders outlining the proclamation’s provisions and its impact on current regulations. This pertains to all permittees in the Hawai’i and American Samoa longline fisheries and U.S. purse seine vessel owners operating in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean.

On Aug. 8, 2025, the U.S. District Court for Hawai’i ruled that the letter was unlawful and vacated it — meaning it no longer has legal effect. The Council is disappointed with



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the decision. Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA), the Council and NMFS are tasked with managing commercial fisheries and must consider the Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, National Environmental Policy Act and other federal laws. These laws ensure healthy fish stocks while safeguarding protected species such as turtles and marine mammals and habitat like corals. The Council and NMFS have promulgated numerous regulations that prohibit destructive gear types, set catch limits, and provide monitoring and reporting.

What the Lawsuit Was About

The lawsuit — filed in May 2025 by three environmental and cultural organizations — challenged both the legality of the proclamation and NMFS’s letter. Plaintiffs argued:

1. The president lacked authority under the Antiquities Act to remove the monument’s fishing restrictions.
2. Even if valid, the proclamation required formal rulemaking before changing the regulations.

The plaintiffs said the April 25 letter bypassed the public comment process, depriving stakeholders of input.

What the Court Decided

Of the eight claims made, the court ruled only on the Administrative Procedure Act and MSA claims, not on the president’s authority, which the judge said would be dealt with later. It found that:

- The letter went beyond explaining the proclamation; it declared regulations “no longer effective.”
- Because those regulations were created through rulemaking, removing them required the same process.

Myths vs. Facts

MYTH: The court permanently closed the monument to fishing.

FACT: FALSE. The ruling only vacated the NMFS letter.

MYTH: Turtles, marine mammals, seabirds and coral reefs are “protected” by banning commercial fishing 50-200 nm from shore.

FACT: MISLEADING. Under existing regulations for commercial fisheries, these species and habitats are already highly protected through various measures limiting gears, areas and bycatch.

MYTH: This was about allowing foreign fleets.

FACT: FALSE. The proclamation applies only to U.S.-flagged vessels, with limited transshipment exceptions. The MSA already prohibits foreign fishing within the U.S. EEZ without a permit, and the proclamation does not change that.

Looking Ahead

A conference is set for September 16 to lay out the schedule for resolving Earthjustice’s claim. The Council will discuss the ruling and options at its 204th meeting September 16-17 in Honolulu.

The Council’s commitment remains the same: managing fisheries based on the best available science, honoring cultural values and ensuring sustainable use of resources that feed communities and economies. 🐟

203rd Council Meeting Highlights, June 10-12, 2025



The camera from an electronic monitoring system captures a "bird's eye" view of the fishing vessel deck. This allows technicians to identify fish and other marine species brought onboard. Photo: NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center.

Council Approves Mandatory Electronic Monitoring for Hawai'i and American Samoa Longline Fleets

At its June meeting in Honolulu, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council took final action to authorize the mandatory use of electronic monitoring (EM) for data collection aboard longline vessels operating under Hawai'i and American Samoa limited-entry permits.

This decision amends the Pacific Pelagic Fishery Ecosystem Plan to include EM systems for at-sea monitoring, such as protected species interactions and other data collection. Implementation will be phased in from 2025 through 2027, with selected vessels required to install and maintain EM systems during this period.

The action comes amid a decline in human observers due to budget constraints at the National Marine

Fisheries Service (NMFS). While NMFS has secured funding to install EM systems and cover administrative and sampling costs through 2027, no commitments have been made for support beyond that.

"Whether it's human observers or EM, this is ultimately a federal mandate, and we're now discussing an unfunded mandate," said Council Vice Chair for American Samoa Archie Soliai. "Given how the American Samoa longline fleet is struggling, I find it very hard to support having industry pay for something that should be the responsibility of the federal government beyond 2027."

The Council emphasized that EM will provide reliable data for compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Marine Mammal Protection Act as a primary objective. These data are also critical to meeting the terms of the biological opinion (BiOp), a legally required document developed under the ESA that outlines how fisheries must operate to avoid jeopardizing the continued existence of protected species. EM will also serve as a standardized bycatch reporting methodology.

Public comments echoed the need for federal support. Nate Ilaoa, vice chair of the American Samoa Advisory Panel, said, "This is a disproportionate burden to our region." He also referenced U.S. agreements dating back to the early 1900s that promised federal support to protect American Samoa's resources.

Eric Kingma, executive director of the Hawaii Longline Association, added, "We support mandatory EM. But we can't take it on if the agency does not take up the costs."

The Council also directed staff to work with NMFS and the longline fleets to conduct workshops to ensure vessel monitoring plans (VMPs) are practical and efficient. VMPs describe the responsibilities of crew at sea to maintain operational EM systems and provide contingencies in case of malfunction. The Council further urged NMFS to outreach to the fleets prior to implementation and to update cost-earnings data to evaluate the economic impact on the American Samoa fleet.

"This has been a very meaningful conversation," Soliai said. "At the bottom line, this is about putting food on the table and sustaining livelihoods that help support small economies. Our collective wisdom will be key in finding solutions."

The Council also approved mandatory crew training on protected species handling and release for both the Hawai'i and American Samoa longline fisheries. The decision follows a successful pilot program launched in April 2024 through a collaboration between NMFS, the Hawaii Longline Association and the Council. Advisory groups expressed strong support for the initiative, the first of its kind in the Pacific. The goal is to improve post-interaction survival of protected species while minimizing burdens on fishery participants.

Council Reaffirms Sustainability of NWHI Fisheries, Urges Policy Revisions Aligned with EO 14276



Fisherman Abe Apilado provides public comment on fishing in the NWHI at the Council meeting on June 11, 2025.

The Council reaffirmed its longstanding position that commercial fisheries in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) were sustainably managed before the designation of Papahānaumokuākea as a marine national monument and sanctuary. For more than 60 years, commercial fishing took place in the region without degrading the ecosystem, which was recognized as one of the healthiest and most intact in the world.

The Council voted to urge the president to lift the fishing ban in Papahānaumokuākea, stating that such action would align with Executive Order 14276, Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness and Revitalizing the American Blue Economy. The EO directs federal agencies to reduce burdens on domestic fishing and boost sustainable U.S. seafood production.

Council Vice Chair for Guam Judith Guthertz highlighted the cultural importance of fishing in island communities.

“When the White House recognized our fishing traditions, it was powerful,” she said. “We’ve honored these practices for generations, and that respect should be reflected in policy decisions.”

Public testimony also emphasized the need for access. Kaua‘i Native Hawaiian

fisher Abe Apilado said, “Nobody ever told the farmer, ‘just make enough food to feed your family.’ So why put that same limit on fishermen?”

The Council has previously recommended that fishing within the monument should be allowed under a special permit system, including access for Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners and provisions for cost recovery.

Council Recommendations Support Domestic Fisheries and Fair Trade

In further alignment with EO 14276, the Council approved several actions aimed at supporting domestic fisheries and addressing inequities in global seafood trade. These include:

- Endorsing a preliminary list of recommendations to reduce regulatory burdens and directing staff to finalize supporting documents.
- Initiating a review of fishing prohibitions in Pacific marine national monuments to inform future federal regulations.
- Sending a letter to the secretary of commerce and U.S. trade representative outlining unfair trade practices and proposing corrective measures under the America First Seafood Strategy.

These actions respond to concerns raised at last month’s Council Coordination Committee meeting in New Bedford, where members discussed the impact of low-cost seafood imports, inconsistent labeling and lack of traceability.

The Council also noted that while the United States provides more than \$60 million annually in foreign fishery aid, U.S. Pacific territories continue to face limited investment in their own fisheries. In 2023 alone, the United States pledged \$2 billion over 20 years to Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau.

“This executive order gives us a real opportunity to reform outdated policies and support our fisheries more effectively,” said Council Executive Director Kitty Simonds.

Uku Catch Limits Set for 2026-2029

The Council finalized catch limits for uku (gray jobfish) in the main Hawaiian Islands, setting the annual limit at 401,020 pounds for the 2026–2029 fishing years. The limit is based on a 36% risk of overfishing after scientific adjustments.

In addition, the Council recommended switching from in-season closures to a post-season accountability measure. If the average catch over the most recent three years exceeds the limit in any year, the overage will be deducted from the following year’s catch limit. 🐟



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25th Anniversary of the WCPFC: From Honolulu 2000 to Today



On Sept. 4, 2000, representatives from 26 nations, territories, and fishing entities met in Honolulu to adopt the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central

session. With its adoption came a new era of regional fisheries governance, requiring cooperation across exclusive economic zones and the high seas, and embedding the precautionary approach and science-based management at the core of decision-making.

Since its establishment, the WCPFC has grown into a body of more than 40 members, cooperating non-members and territories. Its measures now span the conservation of tropical tunas, albacore, swordfish, sharks, seabirds and sea turtles; monitoring and enforcement through observer and vessel monitoring systems; and recognition of the special needs of small island developing states. Over the past 25 years, the Commission has helped sustain the world's largest tuna fishery, with the Western and Central Pacific Ocean consistently producing more than half of global tuna supplies.

At this year's 22nd Regular Session of the WCPFC, to be held Dec. 1-5, 2025, in Manila, the Commission is expected to adopt the first-ever management procedure for South Pacific albacore — the key species for American Samoa's longline fishery. At the 21st Scientific Committee, held in August 2025 in Tonga, scenarios for a new management procedure were discussed and recommended for Commission

decision. The procedure will establish stockwide catch and effort controls to ensure both the economic viability of fisheries harvesting albacore and the long-term sustainability of the stock.

This is important for American Samoa, which needs a management procedure to maintain its Marine Stewardship Council certification and to improve albacore prices for its longline fleet. The December meeting will also set the stage for adopting a bigeye tuna management procedure in 2026, which will directly affect the Hawai'i longline fishery. This year, delegations must agree on a target reference point for bigeye tuna, which will determine total catch and effort levels for longline and purse seine fisheries, to be allocated among WCPFC members in December 2026. That same year, a new tropical tuna measure will be re-negotiated, setting bigeye tuna catch limits for the Hawai'i fleet and other foreign fisheries.

Meanwhile, the 21st Technical and Compliance Committee of the WCPFC will meet Sept. 24-30, 2025, in Pohnpei to review compliance and reporting of WCPFC fisheries and to make recommendations on issues such as harmonizing electronic monitoring with human observer monitoring.

See the next issue of the *Pacific Islands Fishery News* for a history of the Commission. 🐟



A canoe graces MHLCS, hosted by the United States and coordinated by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council in Honolulu in 1999.

Pacific Ocean. The agreement, now known as the Honolulu Convention, created the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), the first regional body charged with conserving tunas and other migratory species across the Pacific.

The Convention was the product of nearly six years of negotiations, beginning with the first Multilateral High-Level Conference (MHLC) in Honiara in 1994 and culminating in Honolulu at the seventh and final



Bigeye tuna caught on a Hawai'i longline vessel. Photo: Caleb McMahan, Hawai'i Seafood Council.

A school of skipjack and yellowfin tuna inside a purse seine set. Photo: Jeff Muir.

International, Trade Policies Pose Both Opportunities and Challenges for WP Fisheries

Key international decisions and new U.S. trade policies are creating both challenges and opportunities for fisheries in Hawai‘i and American Samoa.

The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) met in December 2024 in Fiji and adopted several significant measures. These included minimum standards for electronic monitoring, progress on harvest strategies for bigeye and skipjack tuna, and a new crew labor standard, which the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council supported.

However, the meeting fell short in several areas. Talks to tighten rules on at-sea transshipment stalled. No progress was made on a harvest strategy for South Pacific albacore—a key stock for American Samoa’s longline fishery.

The commission also passed a conservation measure (CMM 2024-06) for Western and Central North Pacific striped marlin. The new rule cuts the Hawai‘i-based U.S. longline fleet’s catch to 228.4 metric tons, with a conditional 165 metric tons allowed only if other nations’ combined catches stay under 2,400 metric tons.

The Council, advisory panels and Hawai‘i’s longline industry criticized the measure, arguing that Hawai‘i was unfairly penalized even though its fleet wasn’t the main driver of overfishing. Still, in March 2025, the Council recommended implementing the catch limit to ensure U.S. compliance.

The lack of a harvest strategy for South Pacific albacore remains a major concern. The American Samoa longline fishery is certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), which allows it to sell fish at premium prices—mainly to the StarKist cannery in Pago Pago and major U.S. retailers.

But with albacore prices at a 20-year low and operating costs rising, the fishery is under pressure. Without a harvest strategy agreed to by December 2025, MSC certification may be revoked, risking market access and economic viability.

A harvest strategy is a science-based decision framework that sets catch and effort limits based on stock health. The WCPFC

Scientific Committee will review proposed rules and reference points this August in Tonga, ahead of a September workshop focused on albacore. The Council will continue pushing for a strategy to be adopted by 2026 to maintain certification and secure the fishery’s future.

On the trade front, a new White House executive order from President Donald Trump could benefit U.S. fisheries. The “America First Seafood Strategy,” released in early 2025, aims to support domestic seafood production, reduce foreign competition and cut regulatory burdens. The strategy also directs federal agencies to address illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, forced labor and other unfair trade practices.

This could level the playing field for U.S. Pacific tuna fisheries, which often face competition from lower-quality, chemically treated imports. However, the policy also brings risks: Hawai‘i and American Samoa’s longline fleets rely on imported bait and supplies, now subject to tariffs that raise operating costs. The Council will continue engaging with agencies to ensure regional fisheries benefit overall.

Later this year, new Marine Mammal Protection Act import rules will take effect. They require foreign fleets exporting to the United States to show their marine mammal protections are comparable to U.S. standards. The goal is to reduce marine mammal bycatch worldwide and ensure imported seafood meets ethical and conservation standards.

Meanwhile, under the High Seas Driftnet Fishing Moratorium Protection Act, NOAA identified vessels from Angola, Grenada, Mexico, China, Taiwan, Gambia and Vanuatu as being involved in IUU fishing or harming protected species. Mexico, previously negatively certified for failing to protect loggerhead sea turtles, remains under scrutiny. By late 2025, the United States will decide whether those nations have taken steps to address violations—or face restrictions on port access and trade.

As these changes unfold, the Council remains focused on protecting the sustainability, profitability and global competitiveness of fisheries in the Western Pacific region. 🐟



*The longline F/V America steams past the islands in American Samoa.
Photo: Edgar Feliciano.*

NMFS Finalizes Coral Critical Habitat Designations in US Pacific Island Territories

On July 15, 2025, the **National Marine Fisheries Service** (NMFS) finalized its designation of critical habitat—areas with features essential to the conservation of a species and that may require special management—for coral species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This decision caps a five-year process that began with the initial proposal in November 2020, followed by a revised proposal in November 2023. Both proposals underwent public review, including hearings in Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and American Samoa in January 2024.

Final Coral Critical Habitat Areas

The designation covers approximately 92 square miles around 18 islands in U.S. waters, including areas in American Samoa, the CNMI and Guam. In the CNMI and Guam, the designation applies only to *Acropora globiceps* within the 0- to 12-meter depth range. In American Samoa, it applies to five listed species — *A. globiceps*, *A. retusa*, *A. speciosa*, *F. paradivisa* and *I. crateriformis* — with depth ranges up to 50 meters depending on the species. Critical habitat areas focus on natural, consolidated hard substrate or dead coral skeleton that support coral reproduction, recruitment and maturation, while excluding harbors, dredged channels and active anchorages.

Revisions Based on Local Input

Following the 2020 proposed rule, territorial governments and the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council raised concerns about the lack of local coordination and the inclusion of unsuitable habitat. The governments were concerned about the potential impacts of the proposed critical habitat designation on their respective

jurisdiction's ability to effectively manage resources and maintain marine and coastal infrastructure. The original maps encompassed entire depth ranges and substrates that could not support coral growth.

The final maps were shaped in large part by work from the territories. Agencies in American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI contributed local data, mapping expertise and knowledge of reef conditions to refine the designation. In American Samoa, the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources, together with the Department of Commerce's GIS team, provided survey data and maps showing where the listed corals are found. This new information submitted during the public comment periods helped narrow the designation and ensure the maps focused on true coral habitat rather than broad areas of seafloor.

Territorial leaders also made their voices heard through formal letters to NMFS, urging that the rule be based on the best available science and that island governments be fully consulted in the process.

Between November 2023 and February 2024, NMFS made further refinements in response to a second round of public comments, removing intertidal rock and boulder areas unsuitable for coral due to low-tide exposure, as well as waters with degraded quality, such as Class A degraded waters near three CNMI harbors and the wastewater treatment plant outfall on Saipan.

Overall, community and government input were instrumental in reducing the designation from the original 230 square miles in 2020 to 97 square miles in the 2023 revised proposal, and finally to 92 square miles in the rule published in July.

What are the Potential Impacts of the Designation?

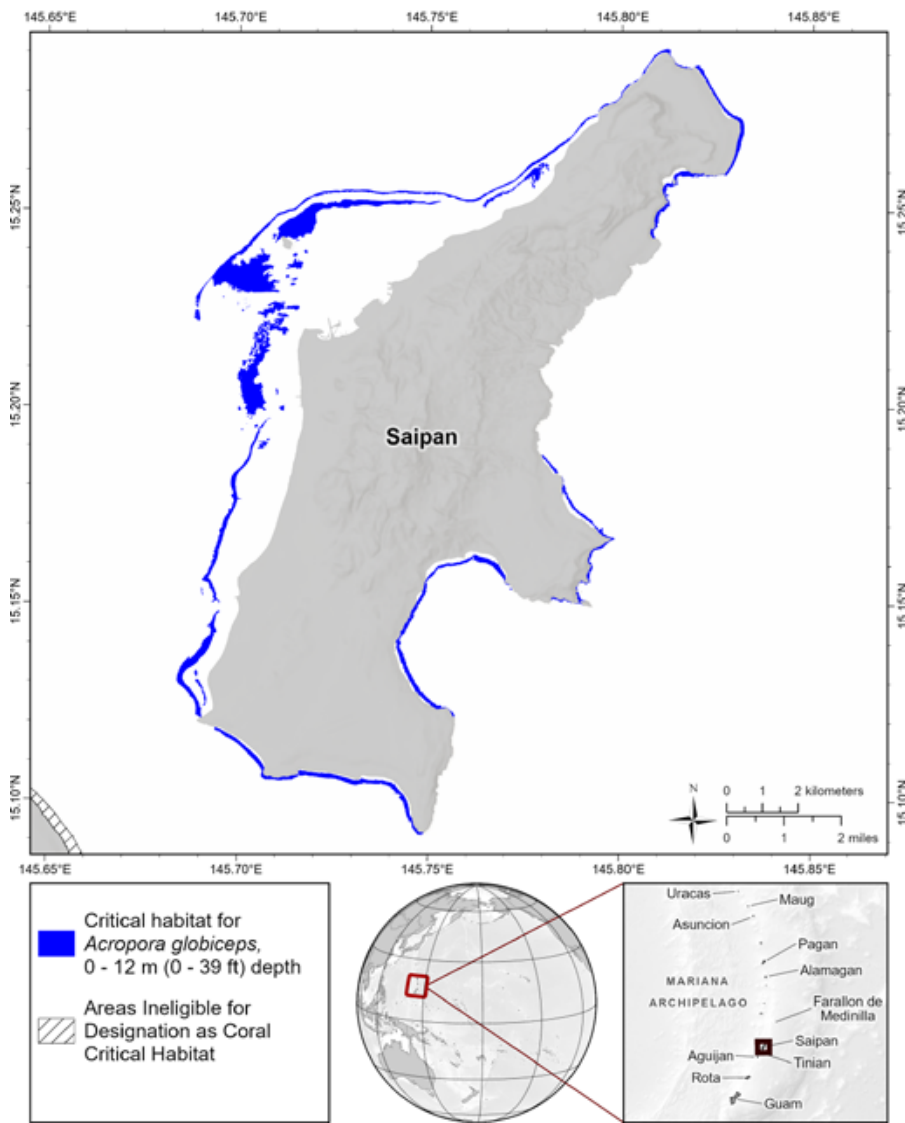
Critical habitat refers to areas with features essential to a species' conservation and is used in Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultations to ensure federally funded, authorized or permitted activities do not destroy or significantly modify those features. It does not, by itself, create a marine protected area, restrict access, halt development, or affect activities without a federal nexus. Nevertheless, territorial governments had raised concerns about potential impacts on infrastructure, research and resource management, since many local marine projects rely on federal funding or permits.

In its Final Economic Impact Report, NMFS estimated the designation's economic impact at less than \$500,000 over 10 years — about \$51,000 annually — limited to the administrative costs of additional ESA consultations. The agency does not expect project modification costs, noting it already consults on activities that may directly affect ESA-listed corals and identifies project modifications through those existing consultations.

Earlier, at the proposed rule stage, NMFS had projected potential project modifications for certain in-water construction, dredging and disposal activities in areas within critical habitat but without listed corals present. The final analysis concluded such impacts are unlikely, as designated coral habitat in U.S. waters represents less than 1% of each listed species' total habitat, and losses from federal actions in these areas would not pose a significant threat to their conservation or recovery.

Critical habitat can only be designated in U.S. waters, and while the ESA allows NMFS to exclude areas based on economic impacts, none were excluded.

Figure 20. Specific areas of coral critical habitat for *A. globiceps* (0 – 12 m depth, blue) in the Saipan Unit.



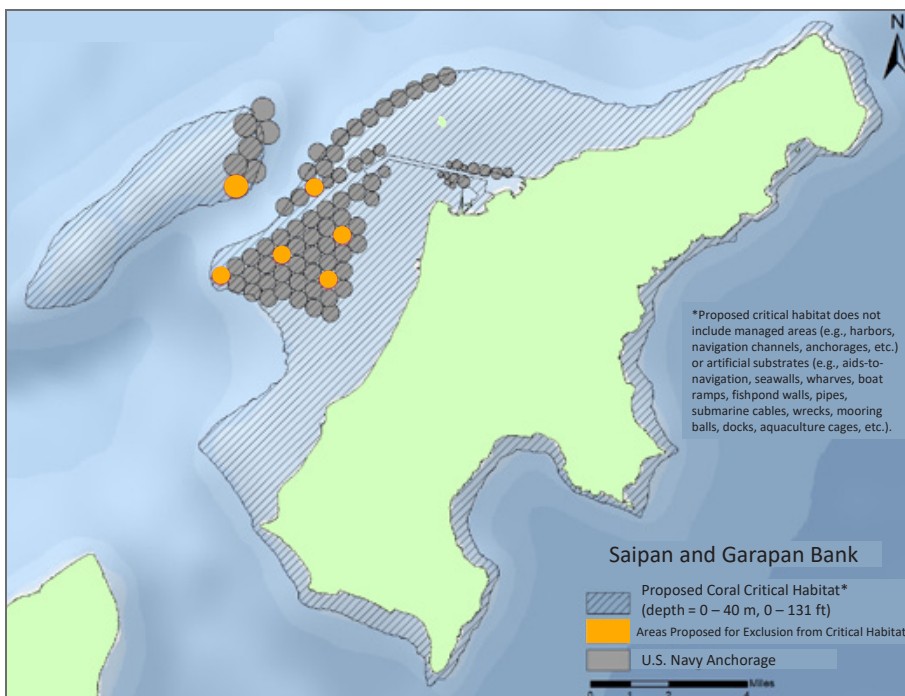
NMFS determined the low estimated costs did not outweigh the conservation benefits, which, though not quantifiable, include increased protection of essential habitat features through Section 7 consultations, enhanced ecosystem services from healthy reefs, and greater public awareness of coral reef conservation.

Other ESA Actions

The coral critical habitat rule is the first of NMFS's ESA actions to advance under the Trump Administration, which has emphasized deregulation. Shortly after taking office, President Trump issued Executive Order 14192 directing federal agencies to identify at least 10 existing regulations for repeal for every new regulation that imposes costs on the public or taxpayers. Guidance from the Office of Management and Budget later allowed exemptions when rulemaking is subject to a court-ordered deadline. In this case, NMFS was required under a settlement agreement to finalize the rule by July 15, 2025, a deadline extended from the original date of December 2024.

Several other ESA actions affecting the region's fishing communities remain pending, including the proposed listing of giant clams, proposed green sea turtle critical habitat and proposed take-prohibition regulations for oceanic whitetip sharks. At the 203rd Council meeting in June 2025, the PIRO regional administrator said her office continues to work on those rule packages at the regional level, but their release depends on political review and decisions of the Trump Administration. 🐟

The designated critical habitat for ESA-listed corals was significantly refined during the five-year process with input from the territorial governments and the Council. Figures show the final map (left, 2025) and original map (below, 2020) for Saipan, with the final version more



Mining the Depths, Pacific at a Crossroads

President Donald Trump on April 24, 2025, signed Executive Order 14285, *Unleashing America's Offshore Critical Mineral Resources*, directing federal agencies to advance U.S. leadership in deep-sea mineral exploration. Within weeks, two commercial mining proposals emerged in the Pacific—one in U.S. waters off American Samoa and another in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone, or CCZ, beyond the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

The American Samoa proposal, submitted by Impossible Metals, falls under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, which gives the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management authority over minerals within the EEZ. On May 20, BOEM began evaluating a potential lease sale, issuing a request for information on geology, fisheries, socioeconomic factors, indigenous practices and environmental conditions. The comment deadline was extended to August 15 at the request of the American Samoa government.

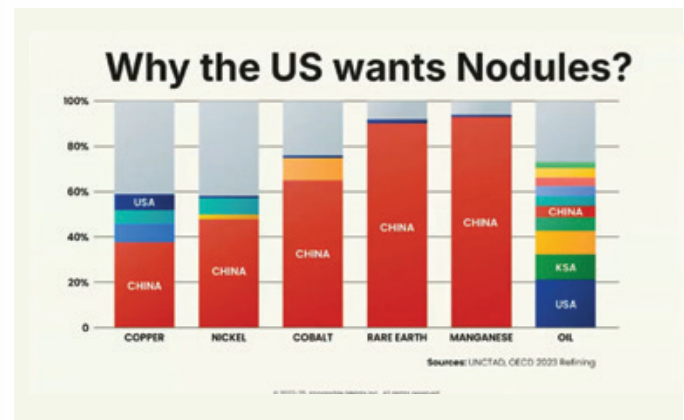
At the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council's 203rd meeting in June, BOEM outlined its lease-sale process. The Council asked BOEM to incorporate lessons from the Cook Islands, which is further along in developing deep-sea mining, to minimize impacts on American Samoa's fisheries.

During a meeting of the American Samoa Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee, BOEM and Impossible Metals described plans to use autonomous underwater robots for selective harvesting, removing 40% of seafloor nodules while leaving 60% to preserve biodiversity. Committee members noted community concerns and urged that all agency and company information be translated into Samoan.

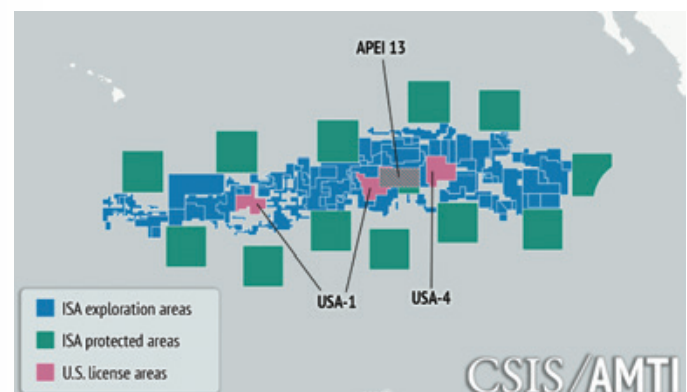
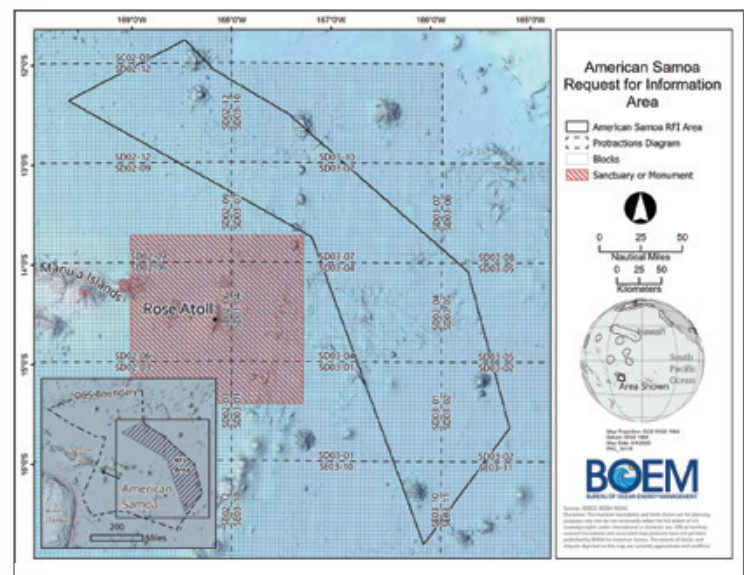
The CCZ proposal is governed by the Deep Seabed Hard Mineral Resources Act, which authorizes the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to license mining beyond the EEZ. On April 29, The Metals Company applied to mine three CCZ areas. The company has worked with Nauru, Kiribati and Tonga on previous ventures, though Kiribati has since withdrawn to explore a deal with China, the global leader in deep-sea mining licenses.

On July 7, NOAA published a proposed rule to amend its licensing process in light of Executive Order 14285. Although the United States is not a party to the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, NOAA may issue licenses beyond the EEZ if statutory and regulatory requirements are met.

As deep-sea mining advances, its effects on ocean health, fisheries and island communities remain uncertain. The Council continues to call for precaution, transparency and inclusive engagement to ensure any development protects both the environment and the people who depend on it. 🐟



Comparison of deep-sea mineral production by country. Source: Impossible Metals.



Seabed mining in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone. ISA - International Seabed Authority; APEI - Area of Particular Environmental Interest. Source: Center for Strategic and International Studies/Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative.



CCC Convenes in Historic New Bedford to Address National Fishery Management Challenges



The May 2025 CCC meeting was held at the New Bedford Whaling Museum in Massachusetts. The CCC typically meets twice each year to discuss issues of relevance to all councils. Photos: Alex Dunn, NEFMC.

The eight U.S. Regional Fishery Management Councils gathered in New Bedford, Massachusetts, from May 13 to 15, 2025, for the annual Council Coordination Committee (CCC) meeting, hosted by the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC). The meeting provided a forum to discuss national priorities, executive mandates, budget constraints and regional science and management challenges.

Key themes included tightening federal budgets, data limitations, shifting ocean conditions and renewed emphasis on deregulation and seafood competitiveness under recent Executive Orders.

Executive Orders Emphasize Deregulation and Trade Equity

NOAA officials outlined new directives under EO 14192 and EO 14276, which require agencies to reduce regulatory burdens and promote domestic seafood production. Councils must submit updated deregulatory recommendations by September 1.

The Western Pacific Council warned that such measures must consider regional context. Longstanding trade and regulatory imbalances—especially the unimplemented Marine Mammal Protection Act import provisions—continue to disadvantage U.S. Pacific Island fisheries.

International Fisheries and Equity

Concerns were raised over reduced U.S. influence in international fishery negotiations. Western Pacific Council Executive Director Kitty Simonds emphasized that Pacific Island representation has been lacking on U.S. delegations, despite statutory requirements.

WP Council Chair Will Sword noted that reopening U.S. EEZs around the Pacific Remote Island Areas to commercial fishing could cut costs for U.S. fishermen and help revitalize the economy of American Samoa.

The CCC stressed the need to align domestic policies with international engagement to ensure competitiveness and sustainability.

Marine National Monuments

The CCC reaffirmed its longstanding position on the management of marine national monuments. In a motion introduced by Chair Sword, the Committee approved sending a letter to President Trump to reiterate support for its 2016 Resolution on Marine National Monuments. The resolution emphasizes the role of the regional fishery management councils and NOAA in ensuring transparent, science-based management of monument-designated areas,

including continued fishing access where compatible with conservation goals.

Budget Constraints and Science Capacity

Nationwide, councils reported impacts from staffing reductions and delayed funding. Stock assessments, surveys and permitting have been affected. Simonds reported severe impacts in the Pacific Islands region, including reduced observer coverage and international engagement.

The CCC approved a motion requesting expedited release of FY2025 council funding to ensure continued operations.

Ecosystem-Based and Risk-Informed Management

With fewer resources, councils discussed using a risk-value matrix to prioritize management for high-risk, high-value stocks. The Western Pacific Council emphasized its longstanding ecosystem-based, archipelagic management approach and the importance of capacity in data-limited regions.

Meeting briefing materials and presentations are available at www.fisherycouncils.org/ccc-meetings/may-2025. 🐟



Charting the Future of Guam's Fisheries



Townhall meetings to discuss proposed territorial fishery management measures from the shoreline to 3 nm were held in Dededo (top), Hagåtña and Inalahan (bottom) in June 2025.

The Guam Department of Agriculture's Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources, in partnership with the University of Guam Marine Laboratory and Sea Grant, is developing Guam's Fishery Management Plan. The plan will guide sustainable fishing practices through science-based measures and community input.

Since the first virtual meeting in 2020 with about 30 fishers and scientists, the department has held numerous outreach events—from village meetings in Mangilao, Inalahan and Dededo to surveys and workshops—to gather feedback on topics such as marine protected areas (MPAs), spawning aggregations, zoning and enforcement.

Recent efforts included social media surveys from November 2024 to January 2025 to identify species of concern, followed by February and April 2025 meetings on nonspatial and spatial management measures. In June 2025, three town halls in Dededo, Hagåtña and Inalahan drew 209 participants from 18 of Guam's 21 villages, providing input on the draft plan.

Proposed management measures

1. Mandatory licensing and catch

reporting — All fishers, whether commercial, recreational or artisanal, would be required to register and report catches. Refusal of creel surveys would be prohibited, and catch photos would be encouraged. **Support: 67%.**

2. Moratorium on bumphead parrotfish (*atuhong*, *Bolbometopon muricatum*) to allow stock recovery. **Support: 87%.**

3. Minimum size limits — Prohibits harvest under 12 inches for: bluefin trevally (*talaya*, *Caranx melampygus*), bluespine unicornfish (*naso unicornfish*, *Naso unicornis*), blue parrotfish (*totot*, *Chlorurus frontalis*), yellowbar parrotfish (*totot*, *Scarus altipinnis*), Pacific longnose parrotfish (*totot*, *Hipposcarus longiceps*), steephead parrotfish (*totot*, *Chlorurus microrhinos*), humpback snapper (*tagafi*, *Monotaxis grandoculis*) and ember parrotfish (*totot*, *Scarus rubroviolaceus*). Also prohibits humphead wrasse (*mameng*, *Cheilinus undulatus*) under 24 inches. **Support: 92%.**

4. "Big Six" commercial sales ban — Prohibits commercial sales at markets and restaurants of *Cheilinus undulatus*, *Hipposcarus longiceps*, *Chlorurus frontalis*, *Chlorurus microrhinos*, *Scarus altipinnis*, and *Scarus rubroviolaceus*. **Support: 85%.**

5. Nighttime spearfishing regulations — Options under discussion:

- Ban commercial nighttime spearfishing; require a permit and daily limits for recreational fishers. **Support: 82%.**
- Seasonal moratorium for all sectors. **Support: 73%.**
- Full moratorium for all sectors with five-year review. **Support: 30%.**

Fisher concerns

From the June town halls, participants emphasized:

- Fishing is not the only cause of reef decline; erosion, sedimentation,

land-based pollution and military activities also have major impacts.

- Overexploitation from nighttime spearfishing—particularly by fishers from outer Micronesia—is a pressing issue.
- MPAs need better enforcement; some should be relocated or adjusted.
- Concerns about size limits, exceptions for children and incidental catch during bottomfishing.
- Licensing costs could burden struggling families; questions remain on how funds will be used and whether there is enough budget for conservation officers.
- Skepticism over repeated management efforts without follow-through.
- Perception that fishers are being unfairly blamed or criminalized.
- Calls for occasional MPA openings and assurances that the plan will adapt to climate change.
- Guam lacks regulations compared to neighboring islands; more outreach is needed to reach experienced and underrepresented fishers.

Next steps

The committee will review the feedback, adjust measures and hold additional meetings, including a dedicated session for the Malesso' community to address concerns over the Achang MPA and Cocos Lagoon, and one with the Micronesian fishing community. A revised plan will undergo another round of outreach before being submitted to the governor and Legislature for public hearings.

The Fishery Management Plan aims to balance cultural fishing traditions with long-term resource sustainability — a shared goal for Guam's fishing community, scientists and policy-makers.

For more information, contact University of Guam Sea Grant Biologist Leilani Sablan Naden at sablanl9009@triton.uog.edu. 🐟

Community Voices Guide Council's Path Forward in American Samoa

In late June 2025, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council and the Pacific Islands Fisheries Group (PIFG) hosted a series of community engagement meetings across Tutuila, Aunu'u, Ofu, Olosega and Ta'u islands. These outreach efforts are part of a two-year initiative to strengthen ties with local fishing communities and to provide a platform for fishers to voice observations, challenges and needs in the face of changing ocean conditions and evolving regulations.

The meetings, held from June 25–27, addressed key topics including fish abundance, climate impacts, shark depredation, barriers to sustainable fishing, and the future of marine national monuments such as Rose Atoll—known locally by Manu'a residents as Muliava. Across the islands, fishers expressed common concerns but also shared island-specific priorities.

Fishers on Ta'u reported erratic currents, coral damage from rough seas and shifting patterns in fish abundance. *Masimasi* (mahimahi) and some bottomfish species appeared less common, while sightings of sharks, turtles and whales were more frequent. Fishers noted that skipjack tuna were too far offshore to target effectively.

A top concern was the deteriorating condition of fishing vessels and engines. Fishers described the high cost of repairs and difficulty sourcing the right equipment such as outboard motors properly sized for their *alia* boats. Safety was a major topic of concern, with requests for VHF radios, EPIRBs and flares to improve emergency response capabilities. Several participants also noted challenges in meeting local Department of Public Safety - Marine Patrol Division safety requirements, which sometimes don't align with federal regulations.

Community members emphasized the importance of teaching youth traditional fishing knowledge, boating skills, knot

tying and safety practices. There was strong support for workshops, electric reels for deep-sea fishing and reviving local fisher associations to improve communication with the Council.

In Ofu and Olosega, fishers linked the decline in fish and coral health since 2019 to climate change, increased freshwater runoff and waste contamination from landfills. The presence of a new algae species was blamed for coral die-offs, potentially affecting the palolo worm harvest, which has declined for four consecutive years.

A significant concern was fuel access. The local fuel station only opens once

infrastructure, especially in Pago Pago, was frequently mentioned, with fishers urging investment in floating docks and safer launch facilities.

There was strong interest in reviving local fish markets, training programs and vocational opportunities to attract more people into the fishing industry. Youth education stood out as a priority, with fishers advocating hands-on training in navigation, safety and traditional practices.

Tutuila fishers also raised regulatory concerns, especially about protected areas and species like giant clams, urging better community engagement before



Community meeting held at a fale on Ofu.

per week, and each person is limited to 10 gallons. This restriction often forces residents to choose between fueling their vehicles or their fishing boats, reducing the number of fishing trips and limiting how far fishers can travel offshore. The islands also lack ice, gear shops and basic tackle, forcing some to use makeshift tools like screwdrivers for reef fishing.

Despite these challenges, fishers reported an abundance of skipjack, wahoo, parrotfish, octopus and giant clams. They called for greater investment in local youth through safety training, conservation education and access to boats and equipment. Community members also expressed interest in opening fishing access to Muliava to support food security.

Fishers on Tutuila and Aunu'u echoed concerns about climate impacts and decreasing yellowfin tuna and palolo. Many observed increasing shark activity, raising calls for a reevaluation of local and federal shark protection laws. The lack of boat ramps and deteriorating marina

new rules are enacted. They stressed the need for clear communication and timely consultation with those who spend the most time on the water.

These meetings provided the Council valuable insights into the day-to-day realities of American Samoa's fishers. The community's feedback will inform future Council initiatives and help ensure that management measures are grounded in local knowledge and needs. Whether it's improving infrastructure, equipping youth with skills or addressing the impacts of climate and regulation, one message was consistent across islands: the resilience of fisheries depends on supporting the people who depend on them.

The Council and PIFG plan to return to American Samoa in November 2025 for a second round of meetings. During that visit, they aim to bring back findings and updates from the June sessions and continue working closely with communities to address the needs they've voiced. 🐟



Marianas Community Weighs Military Impacts on Fishing and Daily Life

ALTERNATIVES AND ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative)

Under Alternative 1, land-based military training on Tinian, including live-fire training at two ranges, would be conducted. The training tempo under Alternative 1 would increase by approximately 15 percent over the No Action Alternative. New training infrastructure would create a physical and virtual training environment on the island.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2 would include the same land-based training on Tinian as described for Alternative 1, but the training tempo would only increase by 5 percent over the No Action Alternative. The same infrastructure proposed under Alternative 1 would be constructed.

No Action Alternative

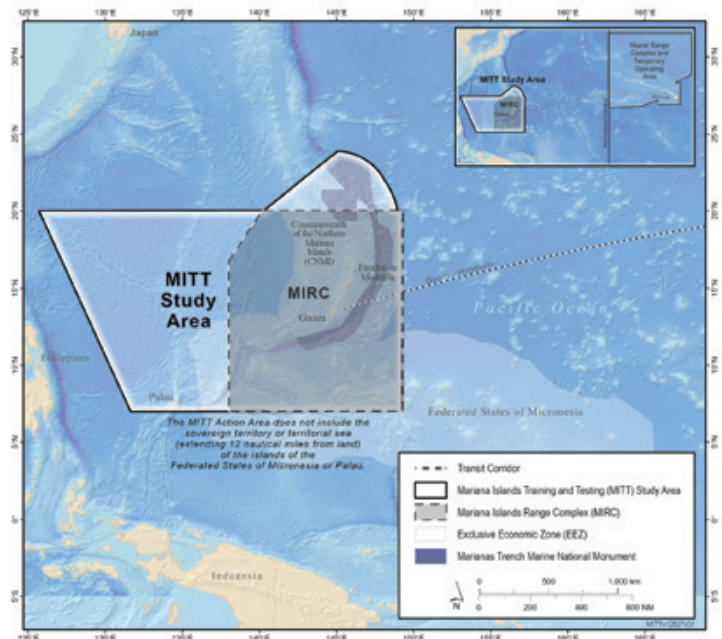
Under the No Action Alternative, land-based military training on Tinian would continue at the current tempo and intensity identified for actions previously analyzed under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). No construction is associated with the No Action Alternative.

Resources Evaluated

- Public Access
- Land Use and Recreation
- Socioeconomics
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Visual Resources
- Transportation
- Noise
- Air Quality
- Public Health and Safety
- Utilities
- Topography, Geology and Soils
- Groundwater and Hydrology
- Surface Water and Wetlands

We welcome your comments – your input matters!

www.cnmijointmilitarytrainingeis.com



In June 2025, public meetings were held across the Mariana Islands to address two major U.S. military activities: the proposed Commonwealth Joint Military Training (CJMT) and the ongoing Mariana Islands Training Testing (MITT). Representatives from the Department of Defense, Joint Region Marianas, local agencies, fishers, business owners and traditional leaders met to discuss the scope of these activities and their potential effects on the islands.

CJMT forums were held June 23–24 in Tinian, June 25–26 in Saipan and June 27 in Rota, with the public comment period on the revised draft Environmental Impact Statement closing on August 20. Earlier, on June 17, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council’s CNMI members and advisers met to discuss MITT. Guam held a similar meeting June 20. The Council will discuss this again at its September 16-17 meeting.

Key Concerns from Community Meetings

At each meeting, participants raised concerns about fishing, transportation and daily life. Council Advisory Panel members emphasized that the military must recognize the current impacts — and anticipate the growing reach as active-duty personnel, dependents and contractors expand in the region. They urged better coordination, especially when training affects fishing, coupled with timely public notices through social media and traditional outlets.

Fishing and Transport

Among the most prominent concerns raised were the potential disturbances to seasonal fishing and traditional grounds. Fishers from across the islands worried that military activities may restrict access to key fishing areas or displace fish stocks, particularly during important seasonal runs and permissible weather. Routes commonly used for commercial fishing and transshipment could also be affected, disrupting the supply chain and limiting small-vessel mobility.

Safety and Communication

With more military vessels and aircraft in the area, community members called for clear, timely announcements of closures, exercises and operational zones to prevent navigational risks, particularly in poor weather or emergencies.

Environmental Concerns

Residents raised questions about the effects of sonar, live ordnance and human activity on marine species and habitats. They called for stronger environmental monitoring, public data access and integration of local ecological knowledge in decision-making.

Cultural and Community Impact

Some feared training could interfere with cultural sites, traditional practices and inter-island travel vital for family, education, health care and livelihoods.

Across the board, community members called for transparency, trust and continual public engagement—not only during initial

scoping or review, but throughout the life of these activities. While national defense is important, many said it must be balanced with protecting local traditions, livelihoods and marine resources.

As the CJMT environmental review and MITT operations move forward, the message from the Mariana Islands community remains clear: inclusive dialogue, thoughtful coordination and respect for local needs are essential. Community members remain committed to ensuring their voices are heard and their waters respected.

Background on Military Activities

The CJMT proposal focuses on expanding live-fire and maneuver training on Tinian, combined-arms training on Pagan and waters and airspace surrounding Farallon de Medinilla (FDM) with supporting infrastructure for up to 3,000 personnel. Training would include amphibious operations and explosives use on land and in nearby waters. CJMT is proposing alternatives for already approved land-based trainings to occur on Tinian.

The MITT program authorizes military readiness activities across the Mariana Islands, including sonar use, live-fire exercises and at-sea warfare training. Activities occur on land, at sea and in transit corridors between the Mariana Islands and Hawai‘i.

For more information, visit: www.cnmijointmilitarytrainingeis.com and <https://mitt-eis.com>. 🐟

CNMI Holds First Fisher's Recognition Week



In a first for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), Gov. Arnold Palacios and Lt. Gov. David Apatang signed a proclamation May 30, 2025, designating the first week of June as Fisher's Recognition Week. This inaugural observance honors the deep-rooted cultural, economic and ecological contributions of the CNMI's fishing community.

To mark the occasion, the Division of Fish and Wildlife's (DFW) Aquatic Education Program and the 2025 Fishers Steering Committee hosted a week of educational and recreational activities for the Saipan community. Families, youth, elders and fishing enthusiasts gathered to celebrate the role of fishers in island life.

The highlight was Family Event Day on June 1 at Garapan Fishing Base. The event featured free health screenings, vibrant cultural performances, outreach booths from local agencies, raffle prizes from Tasi to Table and Lino & Associates, and local food vendors serving popular island dishes.

A crowd favorite was the Talaya Club demonstration, where participants learned to cast a *talaya* (throw net), a traditional fishing technique still practiced across the Mariana Islands. The hands-on activity offered both children and adults a chance to connect with this time-honored skill, reinforcing the importance of cultural heritage in today's fishing practices.

Another major feature was a two-day spearfishing safety workshop under the *Metaw* Initiative, coordinated by DFW's Aquatic Education Program Public Information Officer Dena Kamano. "*Metaw*, meaning deep sea or open ocean in Refaluwasch, suits the training,



In-pool training for Metaw Initiative participants. Photo: Dena Kamano.

and it is a collaborative effort," Kamano said. Led by Morito Asai, Ed Johnson, Fuminori Kawahara and Yoshinari Iizuka, the workshop combined classroom instruction with in-water training on breath-hold techniques, equipment handling, buddy systems and emergency preparedness. Organizers plan to expand the program to Tinian and Rota in response to strong interest.

Fisher's Recognition Week serves as a meaningful reminder of the hardworking individuals and families who sustain our local fisheries and marine traditions. As the CNMI looks to the future of sustainable ocean stewardship, this new annual observance offers a proud opportunity to reflect on the past, honor the present and inspire future generations to carry on our maritime legacy. 🐟

Family members shared photos for the Fisher's Recognition Wall, showcased during the Family Day Event June 1, 2025. Photo: Jesse Boy A. Taitano.



Congressional Corner



With a budget bill and other priorities already passed, the 119th Congress is moving forward on additional legislation, including measures affecting fisheries. Much of the focus has been on protected species.

On July 22, 2025, the House Natural Resources Committee's Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries held a hearing on a discussion draft to reform the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). The draft proposes new definitions and significant changes to the Take Reduction Plan (TRP) process. One notable change for the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council would require councils to concur with proposed TRP fishing regulation changes. These recommendations would then be implemented through the existing Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) process—a departure from current procedures. The hearing allowed subcommittee members to discuss the draft before a potential bill introduction.

The subcommittee also reviewed Executive Order 14276, “Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.” Rick Bellavance, chair of the Council Coordination Committee, testified on the importance of fishing in the United States and the councils’ successful management efforts. He noted that reduced funding and capacity have hindered the councils’ ability to receive timely information for informed decision-making.

Earlier this year, the House passed the Supporting the Health of Aquatic systems through Research Knowledge and Enhanced

Dialogue (SHARKED) Act of 2025. It would require the Department of Commerce to create a task force—including council representatives—to address shark depredation, a persistent issue in the Western Pacific. The bill is now with the Senate’s Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation.

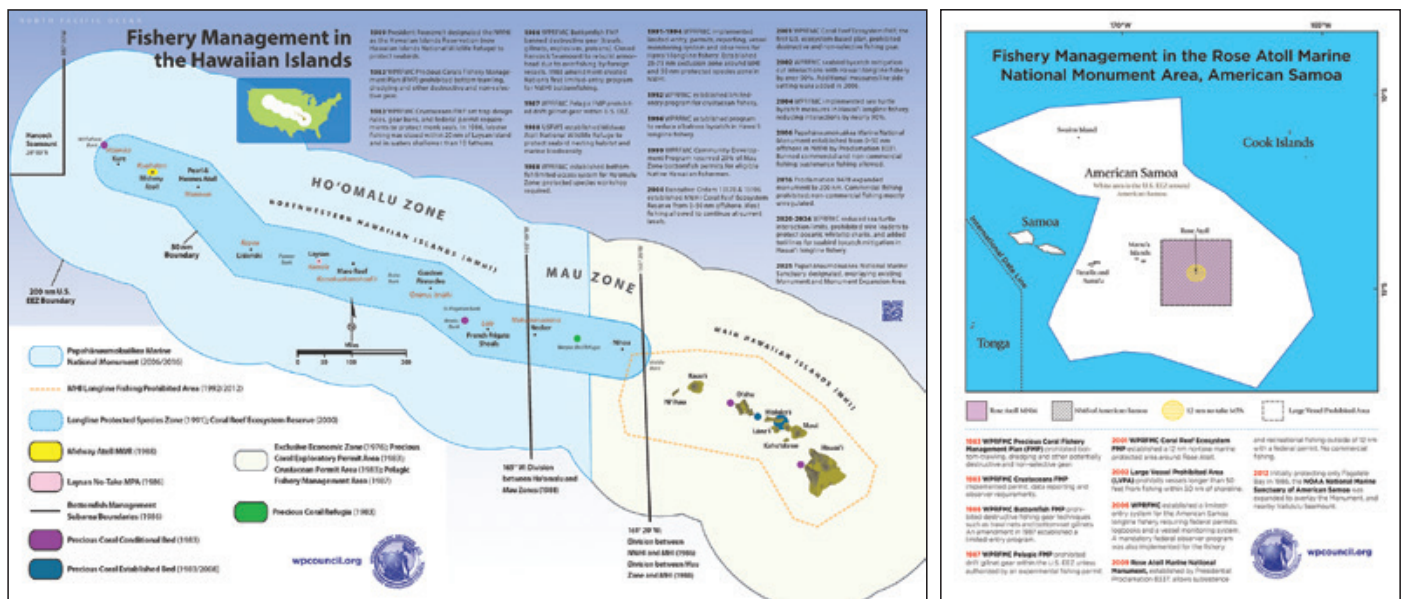
In June, Representatives Huffman (D-CA), Moylan (R-GU), and Case (D-HI) reintroduced the Sustaining America’s Fisheries for the Future Act, which would amend and reauthorize the MSA. Similar legislation was introduced last Congress but did not pass. The new bill adds provisions on climate change and increased fisheries oversight, with potential significant impacts on how fisheries are managed in the Western Pacific.

The Senate has also been actively working on fishery issues. In July, it passed the Illegal Red Snapper and Tuna Enforcement Act (S. 283), introduced by Senators Cruz (R-TX) and Schatz (D-HI). The bill directs NOAA to develop a methodology for identifying seafood’s country of origin to help combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. It now awaits House action, which has a similar measure—H.R. 3706, the Standards for Understanding Source and Habitat Identification (SUSHI) Act.

At the midpoint of the biennium, the 119th Congress has been busy on fisheries legislation and shows no sign of slowing. To see fishery bills that may impact your fishing, visit www.congress.gov or view bills the Council is tracking at www.wpcouncil.org/legislative-congressional.



New Outreach Resources



The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council has developed outreach maps and timelines to help the public understand how fishing regulations have been layered over time—first through the Council’s fishery management plans, then through later presidential proclamations. Two new maps, for the Hawaiian Islands and American Samoa’s Rose Atoll, join an existing Mariana Islands map to show how early Council measures prohibited destructive gear, established protected areas, and set permit requirements—years before national monument designations added further restrictions. See the maps at www.wpcouncil.org/educational-resources/handouts.

Council Family Updates

The U.S. Department of Commerce has appointed three new members to the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, filling both obligatory (state-specific) and at-large (regional) seats. Members serve three-year terms and may be reappointed for up to three consecutive terms. The current term runs from Aug. 14, 2025, to Aug. 10, 2028. The new members are:

Obligatory Seat



William Sword
(American Samoa)*

*reappointment

At-Large Seats



Edgar Feliciano
(American Samoa)



Jessie Rosario
(Guam)

At its 203rd meeting, the Council:

Appointed the following members to the Pelagic Plan Team:

- **Danika Kleiber**, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC)
- **Johanna Wren**, NMFS PIFSC

Appointed the following members to the American Samoa Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee:

- Le Vasa Pathways (**Nathan Ilaoa**, Founder)
- Finafinau (**Sabrina Suluai-Mahuka**, Founder)
- Fatoata (**Vera Peck**, Founder)



American Samoa Governor Pulaali'i Pula appointed **Nathan Ilaoa** July 8, 2025, as director of the Department of

Marine and Wildlife Resources. Ilaoa draws on extensive fishery management experience, including his work as the Council's Island Coordinator and vice chair of the American Samoa Advisory Panel. Congratulations, Nate!

Hawai'i has enacted a new law (Act 238), requiring retail establishments to include country-of-origin labels on all raw 'ahi products — such as poke, sashimi and sushi — sold within the state. The law addresses a loophole in federal labeling rules by ensuring consumers know whether yellowfin or bigeye tuna was landed in Hawai'i or imported. Signed by Governor Green, the requirement takes effect July 1, 2026.

On July 10, 2025, a fisherman named Kuni Pule landed an astonishing 41-pound 'ahi from shore at Makua Beach on the island of O'ahu, HI after a 30- to 45-minute battle — marking his first-ever shore-caught tuna. The moment captured on video quickly drew widespread attention online, celebrated as a rare and thrilling achievement. Local observers called it a true “catch of a lifetime.”



(Image source: khon2.com)

June 2025 Fishers Forum Highlights, Part of 203rd Council Meeting

The Council hosted a lively and thought-provoking Fishers Forum June 9 at the Ala Moana Hotel. Titled “From Hanapa'a to How Much? What It Takes to Fish and Sell in Hawai'i,” the event brought together commercial fishers, seafood marketers and community members to discuss the evolving and often difficult realities of commercial fishing in the islands.

Panelists shared raw and honest insights about the economic, regulatory and cultural challenges facing Hawai'i's fishing community, especially as traditional knowledge erodes and entry into the profession becomes increasingly inaccessible.

“In the '80s and '90s, fishing was big,” said long-time fisherman **Abe Apilado** and Council Hawai'i Advisory Panel member. “Now, fishermen are hardly recognized for their contributions. There's a loss of fishing knowledge and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18



(From left) Kapili Kalahiki-Anthony, Abe Apilado, WPRFMC HI Advisory Panel Vice Chair Gil Kualī'i, Josh Schade, WPRFMC ED Kitty Simonds and member Matt Ramsey at the Fishers Forum held June 9, 2025, in Honolulu.

community representation." He noted "akule used to be king — today we leave fish in the water because no more market."

He pointed to the growing burden of regulations, rising costs and reduced access to traditional fishing grounds such as the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. He also stressed the strong work ethic required to commercially fish, considering today's economic challenges.

"You have to be comfortable with failing in this life," he said. "Fishing goes up and down like the stock market, but one good trip might make up for a week of losses."

Apilado urged the community to invest in youth, remove the stigma from underappreciated fish species, and revive the tradition of fishing as a way to nourish — not just supply — our communities.

Kapili Kalahiki-Anthony, a former NOAA Fisheries observer and founder of Native Hawaiian Trading Co., is a vocal advocate for community-based fisheries. He highlighted the entrepreneurial and cultural aspects of modern-day fishing. He credits Hawai'i's legendary fisherman, Leo Ohai, who taught him the importance of knowing all fishing methods and having the experience to recognize when to target seasonal fisheries.

"You can't just fish — you have to market yourself, use social media," he explained. "It's not just about money, but we do have to pay the bills. The key is to light that spark — to show the kids what we do and connect the dots."

Kalahiki-Anthony discussed the importance of indigenous knowledge and innovation in revitalizing Hawaiian fisheries. Through his nonprofit, he is working to provide vocational training and mentorship, hoping to build a future where Hawai'i's youth see fishing as both a viable career and a cultural calling.

"Fish trapping is a lost art," he added. "We need to create the space and the pride for it to come back."

From the business side of the industry, **Josh Schade** of Ahi Assassins, a member of the Council's Fishing Industry Advisory Committee, addressed market dynamics and the discontent many fishers feel when they see their catch sell for far more than they're paid.

"It's easy to say it's unfair," said Schade, "but between the boat and the plate, there's a whole network of people working hard to get that fish to the customer. If we clarify what happens behind the curtain, we can resolve a lot of the frustration in our community."

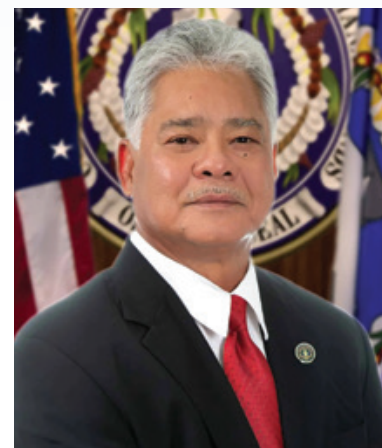
Schade's response to the question about the most important message he

would share with someone wanting to become a commercial fisherman was: "Show respect for each other, family and community."

The forum drew a diverse audience, reflecting a shared concern for Hawai'i's food security, cultural heritage and economic resilience. A recurring message throughout the night was that supporting local fishers means more than buying local — it means acknowledging the *mana'o* (knowledge), effort and heart that sustains the practice.

In Memoriam

Governor Arnold I. Palacios



The Council joins the Pacific community in mourning the passing of the Honorable Arnold Palacios, 10th Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Governor Palacios's connection to the Council spanned more than four decades, beginning in 1983 as a representative for the Commonwealth and culminating in his service as Council Chair in 2013. Whether leading the Division of Fish and Wildlife, the Department of Lands and Natural Resources, or serving in the House, Senate, as Lieutenant Governor or Governor, Arnold was a steadfast advocate for CNMI's fisheries and the Council's mission.

Through personal trials as well as public service, he remained resilient and committed, ensuring that his leadership never faltered. His ability to rise above

challenges reflected both his character and his devotion to his islands.

Even during visits to Arizona to “spend time with the grands,” he made time for fishery calls — a testament to his deep love for the people and the ocean. He was among the few leaders in the Pacific to hold the offices of Speaker of the House, Senate President and Governor, a distinction shared only with the late Governor Lutali of American Samoa.

At the launching of the inaugural Fisher’s Recognition Week on May 30, Arnold remarked, “We are island people. Our culture is embedded in our DNA so we [automatically] know how to sustain these resources. ... It is time that we recognize those individuals who have developed the fishing industry and continue to practice, protect and perpetuate these resources for ourselves today and for generations to come,” he said.

Governor Palacios will be remembered as a good man and visionary leader, known for his fairness, humility and love for his islands. To the Council, he was not only a colleague but also a dear friend who treated us like family — and whom we considered part of ours. His passing leaves a significant void in our process and in our lives. <https://tinyurl.com/GovPalaciosInMemoriam>

Michael A. Fleming



The Council mourns the loss of our longtime colleague and friend, Michael Fleming. Mike was the Council’s longest-serving Advisory Panel member, dedicating decades to advocating for CNMI’s fisheries and the Council’s mission.

An archaeologist by profession, Mike brought invaluable knowledge of ancient Mariana Islands fishing and farming traditions, tools and culture. His skills in trolling, spear-fishing and surfing were unmatched, and his deep love for the ocean reflected his commitment to both community and culture.

Mike was a quiet but influential leader — a mentor to younger fishermen and a bridge between policy and the people whose lives depend on the sea. His wisdom, stories and steadfast advocacy left an indelible mark on the Pacific fishing community. Mike will be remembered as a good man, a dear friend and an unwavering champion for the ocean and the people who depend on it. 🐟

Recipe

Ta’ape Escabeche

Recipe by Sarah Burchard

Taken from: www.chefhui.com/recipes/taape-escabeche



Ta’ape (bluelined snapper, *Lutjanus kasmira*) is an invasive species in Hawai‘i, introduced in the 1950s from the South Pacific to enhance local fisheries. But with its adaptability to a range of environments and no natural predators, its population quickly

exploded. Once known as a rubbish fish, since 2019, Conservation International-Hawai‘i has partnered with local nonprofit Chef Hui to encourage people to eat ta’ape. A recent initiative turns the fish skin into leather for shoes. For more information, visit www.conservation.org/places/hawai-i/invasive-fish-Hawaii-shoe-leather.

Serves 2-4 (as an appetizer)

Ingredients

4 ta’ape fillets, pin boned, skin on and scored
kosher salt and black pepper, ground, to taste
as needed extra-virgin olive oil
½ small yellow onion, sliced thin
½ red bell pepper, sliced thin
½ green bell pepper, sliced thin
2 cl garlic, smashed
½ Thai chili, sliced thin
½ tsp coriander, ground
1 bay leaf
1 tbsp sugar
1 cup apple cider or white vinegar
zest of 1 orange
crackers or crostini

Instructions

Heat a cast iron skillet over high heat. Sprinkle the pan with kosher salt as if you were seasoning fish. Pat the ta’ape fillets dry and place in hot pan skin side down. Press each fillet down with a fish spatula to prevent skin from curling. Season the flesh side of the fish with salt and pepper. When skin is crisp and golden brown add a drizzle of oil to the pan, flip the fillets over and finish cooking – this will only take a few more seconds. Remove from pan, drain on paper towels and transfer to a baking dish.

In the same pan, lower the heat to medium, add more EVOO, add the onions and pepper, season with salt and pepper, and sauté for about 5 minutes until tender. Add the garlic and chili, sauté 1 minute more. Add coriander and bay leaf and sauté 1 minute more. Deglaze the pan with vinegar, season with sugar, salt and pepper, and simmer for 5 minutes. Pour the hot marinade over the ta’ape fillets and top with orange zest. Let cool. Refrigerate for at least 6 hours or overnight. Bring to room temperature before serving. Serve with crackers or crostini. 🐟

2025 Council Calendar

Check the Council website for in-person and remote public participation options for meetings hosted by the Council.

SEPTEMBER

9-11

157th Scientific & Statistical Committee (SSC) meeting

15

Executive & Budget Standing Committee meeting

16-18

204th Council meeting, Honolulu

22-30

Western & Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Technical and Compliance Committee meeting, Pohnpei, FSM*

OCTOBER

15-16

Council Coordination Committee meeting (virtual)*

22-24

Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission 52nd Meeting of the Parties to the AIDCP, La Jolla, CA*

*Meetings not hosted by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council.

NOVEMBER

30-Dec 5

WCPFC 22nd Regular Session, Manila, Philippines*

DECEMBER

2

American Samoa Advisory Panel (AP) meeting

3

Non-Commercial Fishing Advisory Committee meeting (tent)

4

CNMIAP meeting (ChST)

5

Hawaii AP meeting

6

Guam AP meeting (ChST)

8-12

158th SSC meeting (tent)

15-19

205th Council meeting (virtual) (tent)*

Upcoming Events

The 157th Scientific & Statistical

Committee (SSC) meeting will be held Sept. 9-11, 2025, at the Council office, 1164 Bishop St., Ste. 1400, Honolulu, HI. The meeting will be in a hybrid format, with in-person participation available for SSC members and the public, or remote participation via Webex: <https://tinyurl.com/157SSCMtg>.

Major agenda items include: Setting acceptable biological catch for the CNMI bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) for 2026-2029 (action item); SSC Special Projects Working Group reports; Machine learning and artificial intelligence tools overview; Social, Economic, Ecological, and Management (SEEM) process review report; Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) project updates; Shark depredation research status; Deep-sea mining discussion; and Design- and model-based approaches for shark bycatch estimation.

The 204th meeting of the Western Pacific

Regional Fishery Management Council will be held Sept. 16-17, 2025, at the Ala Moana Hotel, Garden Lanai, 410 Atkinson Dr., Honolulu, HI. The meeting will be in a hybrid format, with in-person participation available for Council members and the public, or remote participation via Webex: <https://tinyurl.com/204CouncilMtg>.

Major agenda items include: Commercial fishing in the Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument expansion area (initial action); Fishing in the three remaining Pacific Marine Monuments; CNMI BMUS annual catch limit specifications for 2026-2029 (initial action); HI small-boat fisheries issues-shortline fishing and sharks; Seafood Executive Order 14276 updated recommendations; IRA project updates; Electronic monitoring implementation status and vessel monitoring plan development; International fisheries meeting reports; Seafood Import Monitoring Program update; and Fisheries data and research report.

For more information on the virtual meeting connections, and complete agendas and meeting documents, go to www.wpcouncil.org/meetings-calendars.

Summary of Action Items at the September 2025 Council Meeting

The Council will consider and may take

action on the issues summarized below. A more detailed summary can be found at: <https://tinyurl.com/204CouncilMtgActions>.

1. ACL Specifications for CNMI BMUS (2026–2029) – Initial Action

The Council will consider initial action on annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs) for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) fishery, based on a 2025 stock assessment update indicating the stock is not overfished or experiencing overfishing.

The alternatives under consideration are options that would:

- Take no action and not specify ACLs or AMs.
- Maintain the status quo with an ACL of 82,000 pounds and annual catch target (ACT) of 74,000 pounds.
- Set the ACL at 72,000 pounds and ACT at 66,000 pounds based on revised risk of overfishing (P* 40%) and SEEM score (35%).
- Specify ACL and ACT at the same levels (72,000 pounds / 66,000 pounds) but more conservative than the revised scores (P* < 40% and 35%).

2. Recommendations for Commercial Fishing Regulations in the Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument Expansion Area – Initial Action

The Council will consider initial action on recommendations for commercial fishing regulations within the expansion area of the Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument (Wake, Jarvis and Johnston). This follows Presidential Proclamation 10918 (April 17, 2025), which directs the secretary of commerce to repeal prohibitions on commercial fishing in the area between 50–200 nautical miles.

The alternatives under consideration are options that would:

- Take no action and maintain current prohibitions on commercial fishing.
- Remove all commercial fishing prohibitions within 50–200 nm of Wake, Jarvis and Johnston.
- Remove prohibitions but allow commercial fishing with additional conservation and management measures to minimize potential risks to the monument. 🐟



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From Hook to Horizon: 2024 Snapshot of Pacific Island Fisheries

Alias moored at floating dock, Pago Pago.

In July 2025, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council released the 2024 editions of its **Annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) reports**. These five region-specific documents provide an in-depth look at the status and trends of fisheries in the Hawaiian Archipelago, American Samoa, the Mariana Archipelago (Guam and the CNMI), Pacific Remote Island Areas and the Pacific Pelagic ecosystem.

The reports are a collaborative effort by the Council and its partners, including the National Marine Fisheries Service, Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources, Guam Department of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources and the CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife. Each agency contributes through its role on the Council's fishery ecosystem plan teams, which are responsible for compiling and updating the reports annually.

Each SAFE report includes more than just annual landings. In addition to summaries of catch, effort, bycatch and annual catch limit monitoring, the reports cover recent stock assessments, management actions and regulatory updates. They also incorporate ecosystem and socioeconomic data such as climate-related ocean conditions, interactions with protected species and fishing trends in local communities. The Council, its advisory bodies, partners and the public use these reports to guide sustainable fishery management and support a consistent supply of locally sourced seafood.

KEY TRENDS IN FISHERY PERFORMANCE

The 2024 fishing season underscores the ever-changing nature of U.S. Pacific Island fisheries, shaped by shifting ocean conditions, market forces and ongoing management actions. The annual SAFE reports provide a snapshot of these changes, helping track key indicators over time. The accompanying data tables compare fish catch and revenue between 2023 and 2024, illustrating how catch levels, fishing effort and revenue can fluctuate significantly from year to year.

PELAGIC

In the U.S. Pacific Islands, pelagic (open ocean) fisheries represent the largest sector the Council manages based on both catch and revenue. These fisheries target species such as tunas and billfishes using methods including longlining, trolling and handlining. **Table 1** shows catch, revenue and percent changes for these major fisheries from 2023 to 2024.

Hawai'i

While deep-set longline tuna catches were up slightly in 2024, revenue dropped due to a significant decrease in average fish prices from \$4.85/pound in 2023 to \$4.09/pound in 2024.

The shallow-set longline fishery targeting swordfish also saw a drop in both catch (10% decrease) and price per pound (18% decrease), leading to more than \$2.2 million in lost revenue. Small-boat fishers in Hawai'i faced competition from foreign imports, and neighbor island fishers struggled with preserving fish for the Honolulu auction.

American Samoa

Pelagic landings jumped 25% in 2024, marking the highest catch since 2019, primarily driven by four key tuna species: albacore, yellowfin, skipjack and bigeye. However, the American Samoa longline fleet is declining, with the number of active boats reaching an all-time low in 2024. Within this reduced fleet, the remaining boats worked harder,

Continued on next page



Longline boats, Honolulu Harbor

YEAR OF THE BLUE MARLIN

The 2024 fishing year delivered a remarkable surge in blue marlin (*Makaira nigricans*) catch across the entire U.S. Pacific Islands region, with landings exceeding the historical 10-year average for every island group. Guam and the CNMI led this charge, reporting more than 180% increases from 2023 with 40,279 pounds and 39,075 pounds, respectively. American Samoa (147,574 pounds) and Hawai'i (1,566 pounds) also saw significant boosts, with more than 70% increases in landings from the previous year.

On the water, fishers confirmed this boom. In the CNMI and Guam, many noted an abundance of smaller marlin, typically under 150 pounds, particularly from April to September.

Hawai'i fishers also observed numerous small marlin in early May, though multiple boats in Hawai'i also landed "granders" (more than 1,000 pounds) off Hawai'i Island and O'ahu, showing the potential for truly massive catches.

Continued on back page

Pacific blue marlin (*Makaira nigricans*)
Photo: Oleksandr Sushko/Unsplash.com

Table 1. 2024 catch and revenue for Western Pacific pelagic fisheries

Island Area	Fishery	2024		Change from 2023 (%)	
		Catch (lbs)	Revenue (\$)	Catch	Revenue
Hawai'i	Deep-set longline	29,400,000	98,379,000	+12.8	-2.9
	Shallow-set longline	1,979,000	4,536,000	-10.7	-33.6
	Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) troll	1,323,000	4,263,000	-17.5	-30.0
	MHI handline	508,000	2,187,000	-11.3	-19.4
	Offshore handline	180,000	517,000	-48.3	-67.1
	Total	33,621,000	110,750,000	+8.5	-7.2
American Samoa	Longline	3,399,039	2,935,794	+26.4	-9.2
	Troll	5,120	n.d.	+11.6	—
	Total	3,404,364	3,230,000	+26.4	—
CNMI	Troll	84,333	267,191	-33.4	-40.5
Guam	Troll	699,120	n.d.	-2.1	—

Note: Data for landings and revenues are based on commercial reports and/or creel survey data expansions. Landings and revenues generated from creel survey data are estimates. Not all catch was sold. Revenue values are adjusted. "n.d." indicates that data were not disclosed due to rules regarding data confidentiality. Data obtained from fewer than three sources are considered confidential and cannot be reported.

taking more trips and deploying more sets and hooks than in 2023. American Samoan fishers highlighted a major concern of foreign vessels selling bycatch at significantly lower prices (e.g., \$1.50/pound vs. typical \$2.50/pound), directly undercutting local markets.

CNMI

A major hurdle for understanding CNMI's fisheries in 2024 was limited data collection due to funding and staffing challenges at the Division of Fish and Wildlife, meaning the overall catch estimates are likely lower than reality. Based on the limited creel (fisher interview) survey data, the 2024 pelagic fishery showed decreases in trips, effort and catch. The major exception to this trend was the huge increase in blue marlin, bringing in nearly 40,000 pounds.

Guam

Fishers described 2024 as "a bit slow" overall. Although the number of pelagic fishing vessels declined slightly to 447, overall fishing effort remained comparable to 2023. The long-term trend of gradually declining average total pelagic catch has continued over the past 15 years. In 2024, total pelagic landings fell by 2.7% from the previous year to 699,120 pounds.

BOTTOMFISH

Nearshore fisheries may be smaller than pelagic operations, but they remain deeply woven into the daily lives of Pacific Island communities—supporting local economies, traditions and food security. In 2024, bottomfish fisheries across the Western Pacific showed mixed results, with significant increases in American Samoa and Guam, and notable declines in Hawai'i and the CNMI (see **Table 2**).

In Hawai'i, bottomfish landings declined, and uku catches reached an all-time low alongside drops in licenses, trips and total effort. These declines are likely driven by factors such as rising operating costs, changing markets, shark depredation and the loss of experienced fishers.

Palu gutusiliva (silvermouth) and *malauli* (trevally), American Samoa.

**Table 2. 2024 catch and revenue for Western Pacific bottomfish fisheries**

Island Area	Fishery	2024		Change from 2023 (%)	
		Catch (lbs)	Revenue (\$)	Catch	Revenue
Hawai'i	Deep-7 bottomfish stock complex	151,828	1,321,839	-23.0	-26.8
	Uku (gray jobfish)	38,012	242,865	-15.6	-19.7
American Samoa	Bottomfish	9,465	1,833	+125.2	—
CNMI	Bottomfish	4,898	35,745	-62.6	-5.1
Guam	Bottomfish	36,130	n.d.	+46.5	—

Note: Landings for Hawai'i fisheries are from commercial reports and do not include noncommercial catch estimates, whereas landings for the territories are from creel survey data expansions. Not all catch shown was sold. Revenue values are adjusted. "n.d." indicates that data were not disclosed due to rules regarding data confidentiality.



One exception was lehi, which saw a 68% increase in catch—well above historical averages.

The CNMI also experienced a sharp decline in bottomfish landings, falling more than 50% below historical averages. However, this estimate may be underestimated due to data collection issues.

In contrast, American Samoa’s bottomfish fishery showed positive gains in 2024, with more vessels participating and increased catch per unit effort. The estimated total catch reached 11,737 pounds, a 5% increase over the 10-year average, with eight of 11 species landing above their historic 10-year averages. Guam’s fishery also improved, with landings totaling 36,130 pounds—up 46% from 2023 and surpassing both 10- and 20-year averages.

ANNUAL CATCH LIMITS

To support long-term sustainability, the Council manages non-pelagic fisheries—such as bottomfish—through annual catch limits (ACLs). These limits are designed to prevent overfishing and ensure fish populations remain healthy into the future. A three-year running average of catch is typically compared to the ACL, helping smooth out natural fluctuations in data collected through creel surveys. Current ACLs and catch estimates are available in the annual SAFE reports.

In Hawai‘i, ACLs apply to bottomfish, crustaceans and precious corals. In American Samoa and the Mariana Archipelagos, they apply only to bottomfish. While ACLs once covered a broader set of species, many were reclassified in 2019 from management unit species (MUS) to ecosystem component species (ECS), meaning they are now monitored rather than managed with specific catch limits.

In 2024, new species-specific ACLs were implemented for bottomfish MUS (BMUS), replacing earlier rebuilding limits. These updates followed a recent stock assessment showing that all of American Samoa’s BMUS are being sustainably harvested.³ None of the BMUS exceeded the new ACLs in 2024.

Guam’s three-year average catch, however, did surpass the previous rebuilding ACL of 31,000 pounds (see Table 3). A 2024 stock assessment update for Guam’s BMUS complex found the stock is no longer overfished and is not experiencing overfishing.⁴ In response, the Council recommended a revised ACL of 34,500 pounds, and NMFS is now advancing this change through the rulemaking process. This reflects a responsive management approach that adapts to improving stock conditions.

Table 3. ACLs for Western Pacific MUS compared to 3-year average catch values (2022-2024)

Island Area	Fishery	MUS	ACL (lbs)	3-year ave. catch (lbs)	Portion of ACL caught (%)
Hawai‘i	Bottomfish	Deep 7 bottomfish	492,000	179,417	30.9
		Uku (gray jobfish)	295,419	259,274	87.8
	Crustacean	Deep-water shrimp	250,773	18,527	7.4
		Kona crab	30,802	4,065	13.2
American Samoa	Bottomfish	<i>Aphareus rutilans</i>	8,554	513	6.0
		<i>Aprion virens</i>	4,872	1,583	32.5
		<i>Caranx lugubris</i>	3,086	911	29.5
		<i>Etelis coruscans</i>	4,872	646	13.3
		<i>Lethrinus rubrioperculatus</i>	8,554	1,422	16.6
		<i>Lutjanus kasmira</i>	16,645	610	3.7
		<i>Pristipomoides flavipinnis</i>	2,579	363	14.1
		<i>Pristipomoides zonatus</i>	1,521	36	2.4
		<i>Variola louti</i>	2,205	88	4.0
CNMI	Bottomfish	Bottomfish	82,000	24,843	30.3
Guam	Bottomfish	Bottomfish	31,000	31,426	101.4

Note: All Hawai‘i catch values are from commercial data except for uku, which includes Hawai‘i Marine Recreational Fishing Survey data estimates that are known to have high uncertainty.

Bottomfish catch, CNMI.
Photo: Lino Tenorio



IMPROVEMENTS GOING FORWARD

For the 2024 reports, the Council reorganized the American Samoa fishery performance section to present data by individual species, aligning with the latest NMFS stock assessment and newly recommended ACLs. Additional updates included the incorporation of new climate and oceanic indicators in the pelagic report.

As the Council marks the 10th anniversary of the current SAFE report format, it plans to convene working groups to evaluate and revise the reports. Future improvements may include extending time series to offer more historical context, integrating fishery performance data with climate indicators and exploring automation to streamline the update process.

Full reports are available on the Council's website at www.wpcouncil.org/annual-reports. Select content will soon be available through the Council's online portal (www.wpcouncildata.org), which offers easy navigation and data downloads.

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¹Goodyear CP. 2003. Spatio-temporal distribution of longline catch per unit effort, sea surface temperature and Atlantic marlin. *Mar Freshw Res* 54:409–417.

²Su NJ, Sun CL, Punt AE, Yeh SZ, Dinardo G. 2011. Modelling the impacts of environmental variation on the distribution of blue marlin, *Makaira nigricans*, in the Pacific Ocean. *ICES J Mar Sci* 68:1072–1080.

³Nadon MO, Oshima M, Bohaboy E, Carvalho F. 2023. *Stock assessment of American Samoa bottomfishes, 2023*. NOAA Tech Memo NMFS-PIFSC-143.

⁴Bohaboy E, Matthews T. 2024. *Stock Assessment Update of the Bottomfish Management Unit Species of Guam, 2024*. doi:10.25923/rmxw-gh78.

YEAR OF THE BLUE MARLIN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

It's no secret that environmental variables play a huge role in the location of fish and the amount caught. Throughout 2024, many fishers across the region observed shifts in wind patterns, warmer water temperatures and changes in the usual timing and presence of various fish species, including blue marlin. These are more than just observations; they're critical clues to understanding fish behavior.

Blue marlin distribution is closely linked to sea surface temperature (SST), as they spend most of their time in the warmer surface layers.^{1,2} During El Niño events, for example, SST typically increases while chlorophyll concentrations—used as a proxy for ocean productivity and food availability—decrease. This often causes blue marlin to shift eastward in search of cooler waters and more abundant prey.²

Notably, 2024 marked the Pacific Ocean's transition out of El Niño conditions. This shift likely contributed to the westward movement of blue marlin populations, returning toward the Western Pacific. The resulting environmental change helps explain the significantly higher blue marlin catch observed in Guam and the CNMI compared to more easterly regions. It's a strong reminder that broad oceanographic patterns have a direct influence on what shows up on the lines.

Shark Depredation in the Western Pacific Region

Shark depredation is an ongoing and escalating issue across fisheries in the Western Pacific Region. Recent surveys show that at least one in four fishing trips experience a depredation event—and at times, more than half are affected.

The Council's advisory groups and local fishermen have identified mitigation and deterrent development as immediate priorities. It has become the greatest obstacle to fishery performance, particularly for small-boat fisheries. Longline fisheries also face depredation challenges associated with sharks and false killer whales.



Photo: Roy Morioka

Research led by the University of Hawai'i (UH) identified species involved in these events, and NMFS has surveyed frequency in some island areas. Currently, the UH Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology is testing potential deterrents that could mitigate this problem and enhance human safety.



A false killer whale eating a yellowfin tuna.

Photo: Tori Cullins.

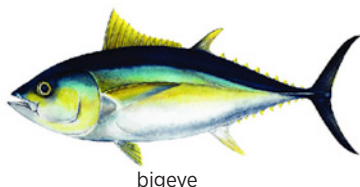
Cost-effective, practical tools are urgently needed to reduce economic losses and improve fishery performance across the region. This has been a Council request for more than a decade. The SHARKED Act, proposed Jan. 3, 2025, acknowledges the issue as a national concern.

It is pending a vote and would establish regional and national task forces, including the fishery management councils, to address shark depredation.

The four main tuna species in the tropical and subtropical waters of the Western and Central Pacific Ocean.



yellowfin



bigeye



albacore



skipjack