

## National Marine Fisheries Service Pacific Islands Regional Office

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### REPORT TO THE 206th WESTERN PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL MEETING

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO) is responsible for assisting the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) in the development of fishery management plans and amendments, initiating Federal fishing regulations, issuing Federal fishing permits, and monitoring fisheries. Other major responsibilities include the conservation and recovery of protected species, conservation and restoration of marine habitats, including the Pacific marine national monuments, and coordination with international organizations to implement fishery agreements and treaties. The following information is provided to update the Council on NMFS activities since the 205<sup>th</sup> Council meeting held December 16-17, 2025.

#### **SPOTLIGHT:**

In December 2025, to reduce time and cost burdens to both fishery participants and the agency, PIRO revised the duration of validity for a Hawaii longline permit from one to two years. For example, a permit issued on March 4, 2026 will expire on March 3, 2028. Additionally, Western Pacific Receiving Vessel permits will also be issued for a 2-year time period. The duration of an American Samoa longline permit will remain at three years, which provides permit holders time to meet the minimum landing requirements needed for permit retention.

#### **RULEMAKING**

PIRO is currently developing a proposed rule under the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Implementation Act authority to implement decisions of the Commission for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean on non-entangling fish aggregating device design requirements and other requirements. This rulemaking implements CMM 2025-02, "Conservation and Management Measure for Bigeye, Yellowfin and Skipjack Tuna."

#### **PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

##### **Habitat Conservation**

On February 11, 2026, PIRO completed the essential fish habitat (EFH) consultation with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) on preliminary activities associated with the commercial leasing for minerals offshore American Samoa. The proposed federal action is to issue up to two commercial leases for marine mineral development in the American Samoa Outer Continental Shelf and to authorize the corresponding preliminary activities, which are limited to early-stage data collection and surveys necessary to develop a comprehensive

“Delineation, Testing, or Mining Plan.” No major adverse effects to EFH are expected from these preliminary activities. Seven other abbreviated EFH consultations and seven programmatic consultation implementations have been completed since mid-December 2025, with action agencies including Federal Highways, the Navy, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

### **International Fisheries**

On February 18, 2026, PIRO and the NMFS West Coast Regional Office hosted a webinar on North Pacific albacore management to discuss harvest strategies and translating fishing intensity into management metrics.

During February 24-March 6, 2026, PIRO participated in the 14th annual meeting of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization (SPRFMO), the SPRFMO 13th Compliance and Technical Committee (CTC) meeting, and the SPRFMO 13th Financial Advisory Committee (FAC) meeting, in Panama City, Panama. The United States put forward a proposal to further strengthen the Jumbo Flying Squid conservation and management measure and co-sponsored New Zealand’s proposal for a binding crew labor measure. The United States focused on supporting the adoption of Electronic Monitoring Minimum Standards that are being developed by a working group chaired by the United States.

On March 9, 2026, PIRO participated in the 8th WCPFC Regional Observer Programme Online Meeting. The meeting participants discussed, among other items, two U.S. proposals that were submitted to WCPFC21 to improve the use of regional observer programme data as part of the compliance process.

During March 11-13, 2026, PIRO participated in the 3rd intercessional meeting of the Joint Inter-American and Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Northern Committee Meeting on the management of Pacific bluefin tuna from, in Newport Beach, CA.

During March 17-18, 2026, PIRO participated in the inaugural meeting of the IATTC-WCPFC Joint Working Group on South Pacific Albacore Tuna held virtually

### **Protected Resources**

On September 19, 2025, PIRO Protected Resources Division (PRD) reinitiated Endangered Species Act (ESA) section 7 consultation on the authorization of the Hawaii deep-set longline fishery at the request of PIRO Sustainable Fisheries Division. The fishery exceeded the reinitiation triggers for the incidental take statement in the 2023 biological opinion for oceanic whitetip sharks and leatherback sea turtles during the first and second quarter of 2025, respectively. The consultation is anticipated to be completed in March 2026.

On February 3, 2026, PIRO PRD initiated expedited informal consultation with BOEM on proposed marine habitat surveys to support the commercial leasing for deep sea critical minerals mining offshore of American Samoa. These preliminary activities are specifically

defined as those with no significant adverse effects on the natural resources and are not mineral excavation activities. The consultation is anticipated to be completed by March 5, 2026.

On February 4, 2026, PIRO PRD completed a reinitiation of the consultation on the bottomfish fisheries of American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Main Hawaiian Islands as managed under the American Samoa, Mariana Archipelago, and Hawaii Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plans. This reinitiation considered the potential effects of fishery activities on designated coral critical habitat. This consultation concluded that the fisheries do not adversely affect designated coral critical habitat and did not provide any additional reasonable and prudent measures from the standing consultation to minimize the fisheries' effects on that habitat. The Incidental Take Statement, Reasonable and Prudent Measure and associated Terms and Condition(s) from the existing biological opinion (PIRO-2019-01148; I-PI-18-1752-AG) are not changed from this consultation, and are therefore still valid.

### **Sustainable Fisheries**

On February 4, 2026, NMFS convened the annual meeting of the Western Pacific Stock Assessment Review (WPSAR) Steering Committee. One of the main tasks was reviewing the WPSAR schedule. The Steering Committee agreed that:

- 1) the American Samoa bottomfish update will be held in April 2026 and would focus on a revised species list,
- 2) the MHI deep 7 bottomfish update is scheduled for December 2026, and
- 3) the Guam bottomfish benchmark assessment will be moved to 2028.

In addition, the Center for Independent Experts will review the Deep 7 research track assessment in 2027.

The Steering Committee also agreed that no new changes to the WPSAR Policy are needed, and they will work to ensure independence of stock assessment review when potential reviewers participate in data workshops and other tasks related to the stock assessment cycle.

PIRO continues to update information on fish catch limits, available on the [website](#).

### ***Protected Species Workshops***

To prepare for the increased demand as the March 3, 2026 longline vessel permitting deadline approaches, PIRO has increased the frequency of protected species workshops (PSW) to a twice-weekly schedule. The increased availability of workshops also serves to mitigate the suspension of the web-based self-guided workshop option, which was discontinued in 2025 due to enhanced cybersecurity requirements. PIRO will continue to offer in-person workshops twice weekly through February 2026 to ensure vessel owners and operators have ample opportunity to meet certification requirements prior to the permitting deadline.

Also, PSW outreach material, including protected species identification, handling and release instructions, and the long-form guidelines (downloadable PDFs in [English](#), [Tagalog](#), [Indonesian](#), and [Vietnamese](#) ) remained available to fishermen on the PIRO PSW [webpage](#). A matching animated [video](#) is also available online. Translated captions for the video are available in Tagalog, Ilocano, Samoan, Indonesian and Vietnamese. Document links can be found on the PIRO PSW [webpage](#) and the NOAA [digital resource library webpage](#).

#### *External Meetings and Workshops*

On February 10-11, 2026, the Council hosted a shark depredation workshop at the Ala Moana Hotel in Honolulu, HI. PIRO Sustainable Fisheries Division (SFD) staff provided presentations on federal prohibitions related to shark finning and opportunities through the Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program. Staff also facilitated breakout sessions on the second day on regulatory and environmental changes and new management approaches. The workshop provided multiple opportunities to network and connect with shark deterrent designers, shark researchers, and fishermen that experience high rates of depredation.

On February 4-5, 2026, PIRO SFD staff participated in the Council's Protected Species Workshop held at the Council office in support of the Inflation Reduction Act Protected Species Project that informs the Pacific Pelagic Fishery Ecosystem Plan. SFD staff engaged with managers, scientists, and fishery representatives to review ecosystem drivers and recent protected species interaction trends in the Hawai'i longline fisheries, including interactions with oceanic whitetip shark, leatherback sea turtle, and loggerhead sea turtle. Through a Structured Decision Making framework, SFD staff contributed to identifying key management challenges, evaluating risks and uncertainties, and developing a transparent decision model to inform future actions consistent with applicable statutes.

PIRO SFD staff participated in three Electronic Monitoring Vessel Monitoring Plan (VMP) Forum meetings hosted by the Council and the Hawaii Longline Association at the NOAA Fisheries Pier 38 Service Center. The forums provided updates on the VMP and gathered stakeholder input prior to rollout. SFD staff presented updates, addressed fisheries-related questions, and contributed to discussions on implementation logistics. Feedback from the meetings will be incorporated into refinements to ensure the VMP is clear, practical, and aligned with operational realities.

#### *Permits*

PIRO SFD continues to assist fishermen with processing permit transactions electronically. Under the electronic application process, all applications must be submitted online through NMFS National Permit System or through the Kiteworks secure file transfer. Fee payments are processed in NPS or through the Department of Treasury's [pay.gov](#) secure online payment system. PIRO's permit website includes [instructions](#) for fishing permit applications and for 2025 Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) certificates. Applicants may contact NMFS for individual assistance at [piro-permits@noaa.gov](mailto:piro-permits@noaa.gov) or (808) 725-5190. Applicants may also visit the [website](#) for current fishing permit status.

In 2025 through 2026, PIRO is migrating all Pacific Islands Region permit applications and processing to the online NMFS National Permit System (NPS) to improve public access, efficiency, and tracking. In addition to NPS system enhancements, NMFS may offer outreach events and educational materials to introduce the system to permit holders in all the islands, depending on funding. WCPFC Area Endorsement is now available via NPS. Additional permits, including Western Pacific General Longline, American Samoa Longline and Northern Mariana Islands Bottomfish permit applications will be added in the next few months.

**Permits as of February 20, 2026:**

<b>Permit</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Pelagic</b>	
Hawaii longline (limited entry)	150 active, 14 inactive/no-vessel (164 of 164)
American Samoa longline (limited entry)	20 current, 40 available (60 of 60)
Western Pacific general longline	-
Receiving vessel	7
Pelagic squid jig	-
Experimental fishing permit	-
<b>Hawaii</b>	
Main Hawaiian Islands non-commercial bottomfish	2
Special coral reef ecosystem	-
Precious coral	-
Crustaceans	1 (1 shrimp)
<b>American Sāmoa</b>	
Special coral reef ecosystem	-
Precious coral	-
Crustaceans	-
<b>Mariana Islands</b>	
Guam large vessel bottomfish	-
Northern Mariana Islands bottomfish	5
Special coral reef ecosystem	-
Precious coral	-
Crustaceans	-
<b>Pacific Remote Island Areas</b>	
Pelagic Troll & Handline	1
Bottomfish	-
Special coral reef ecosystem	-
Precious Coral	-
Crustaceans	-
<b>Marine National Monument</b>	
Recreational Fishing	-
Recreational Charter	-