



PACIFIC ISLANDS FISHERY NEWS

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The Monumental Task of Managing Longline Fisheries in the Western Pacific

Walk into a fish market or grocery store in Hawai‘i and you are bound to see a poke counter. You can thank a fisherman for that, and in most cases, you can thank a longliner. Beginning in the 1960s, commercial fishing shifted from smaller reef species and to larger pelagic fish as fishing technology emerged: affordable outboard motors, fiberglass hulls and the development of fish aggregating devices. Improved technology, combined with changing tastes and increasing access to deep-sea species, set the stage for the development of a new form of fishing in Hawai‘i — longline fishing.

Japanese immigrants played a key role in this transition. After completing their contracts on sugar plantations, many returned to what they knew best — fishing. Large-scale commercial fishing began with skipjack tuna, eventually supplying a cannery,

and by 1917 these fishermen had introduced a Japanese method known as “flagline fishing.” Using a mainline with suspended leaders, baited hooks, floats and flags, this method served as the precursor to modern longlining. Later technological advances — monofilament lines, hydraulic reels and line setters — shaped longline fishing as we know it today.

Longline fishing in the United States is managed as a sustainable activity and remains a critical part of the regional economy. While Hawai‘i has the largest and most well-known longline fleet, the Western Pacific region includes a second major longline fleet based in American Samoa, which plays an equally important role in supporting island communities and U.S. seafood supply. The Hawai‘i longline fleet is the state’s largest food producer, landing more than 30 million pounds of

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STORY ICON KEY

REGIONAL INTEREST



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FISHERMEN



EDUCATORS



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*Dedicated to ecosystem-based
fisheries management in the
U.S. Pacific Islands.*



Managing Longline Fisheries

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



fish and generating more than \$110 million annually. It is also the largest contributor to Hawai'i's seafood industry, which employs nearly 10,000 people and produces \$867 million in annual sales. In American Samoa, the longline fleet targeting albacore tuna has landed between 2 and 5.6 million pounds

managed. The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council's Pacific Pelagic Fishery Ecosystem Plan (originally the Pelagic Fishery Management Plan adopted in 1987) governs the fishery through limited access permits, vessel size restrictions, area closures around Hawai'i and American Samoa to avoid gear conflicts, and extensive protected species mitigation. Requirements include observers or electronic monitoring, protected species workshops, crew handling and release training, and gear mandates such as circle hooks, monofilament leaders and tori lines to reduce interactions with sea turtles, sharks and seabirds. Because the targeted species migrate across entire ocean basins, the fleets must also comply with international measures established by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission.

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council's Pacific Pelagic Fishery Ecosystem Plan governs the fishery through limited access permits, vessel size restrictions, area closures around Hawai'i and American Samoa and protected species mitigation.

annually over the last decade, including 3.4 million pounds in 2024. That same year, dockside revenues from both local longline and purse seine fisheries exceeded \$43 million and supported the StarKist cannery, which processes 100,000 tons of tuna annually — most of the resulting 500 million cans bound for U.S. consumers.

Since these fisheries produce such high volumes and significant economic benefits, it is important that these fisheries are well-

despite this broad suite of domestic and international regulations, longline fisheries are facing increasing pressure from large-scale spatial closures in the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and proposals to restrict fishing on the high seas. Marine national monuments established by Presidential proclamation have closed more than half of the Western Pacific's EEZ and over a quarter of the entire U.S. EEZ. Meanwhile, global efforts to restrict fishing

In American Samoa, ... fishery revenue (2024) exceeded \$43 million and supported the StarKist cannery, which processes 100,000 tons of tuna annually — most of the resulting 500 million cans bound for U.S. consumers.

Longline vessels docked in Pago Pago Harbor, American Samoa, with the StarKist cannery across the bay.

in areas beyond national jurisdiction continue to advance, potentially further shrinking the waters available to the longline fleet. It is like carving up a pie until only a small sliver remains for U.S. fishermen based on the belief that simply setting aside large areas, rather than implementing effective management, will conserve highly migratory species.

The 2016 expansion of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (PMNM), which created one of the world's largest protected areas, illustrates this debate. One study (Medoff et al. 2022) suggested that highly migratory species such as yellowfin and bigeye tuna increased in abundance near the boundary, creating a "spillover effect" that boosted catch rates. However, these ecological claims stand in stark contrast to the economic reality observed after the closure. Chan (2020) found that vessels displaced from traditional grounds experienced a significant 7% drop in catch rates and lost \$3.5 million in revenue within 16 months. Assessments of related Pacific marine protected areas (MPAs) have shown mostly null or negative ecological effects, including a staggering 84% reduction in standardized bigeye catch

rates associated with a 2009 closure in the region (Gilman et al. 2020).

The scientific debate centers on methodology and context. Hilborn et al. (2025) argued that the positive spillover reported by Medoff was likely the result of an incorrect modeling assumption; their re-analysis found no net benefit to the fishery. Independent, non-fisheries-dependent data from Blanluet et al. (2025) similarly showed no measurable increase in tuna biomass inside a nearby MPA. Hampton et al. (2023) found that

Marine national monuments established by Presidential proclamation have closed more than half of the Western Pacific's EEZ and over a quarter of the entire U.S. EEZ.

large spatial closures do not produce significant conservation benefits for highly mobile species like tuna and that direct catch and effort controls are more effective. Collectively, these studies suggest that large oceanic MPAs established in areas without intense fishing pressure, such as PMNM or the Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument, may not generate the expected conservation benefits and can even impose substantial economic costs on fishing communities.

Today, shrinking fishing areas, rising costs of food, fuel, ice and bait, low ex-vessel prices and shortages of trained crew all threaten the viability of the U.S. longline fleets in Hawai'i and American Samoa. These pressures ripple far beyond the fishermen but are echoed throughout the fishing community, affecting suppliers, processors, restaurants and ultimately consumers. We have all enjoyed having fresh, sustainable poke every time we walk into the supermarket. It is time to recognize the longline fishermen who make this possible and to support their continued efforts to supply seafood to the people of Hawai'i. 

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'Ahi slabs prepped for market.



204th Council Meeting Highlights

September 16-17, 2025

Council Responded to President Trump's Mandates, Recommended Opening Monuments to Commercial Fishing

After a long discussion and public comments, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council agreed to move forward allowing commercial fishing within the four marine national monuments in the U.S. Pacific.

With a Proclamation and Executive Order from President Trump for guidance, the Council deliberated on the impacts of commercial fishing within the boundaries of the Pacific Islands Heritage, Rose Atoll, Marianas Trench and Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monuments.

"The Council is responding to the Proclamation through the Council process of the MSA. It is transparent and people have the opportunity to voice their opinions," said Hawai'i Council member Matt Ramsey. "If the Council takes no action, others might make the decision for us. I appreciate the opportunity to shape and reform those commercial fishing regulations."

The Council directed staff to prepare an analysis of management options

to implement Presidential Proclamation 10918, "Unleashing American Commercial Fishing in the Pacific." The analysis, to be presented at the Council's December meeting, will ensure sustainable harvest of fishery resources while conserving protected species and monument resources.

During the public comment period, Joe Hamby, representing the U.S. purse seine industry, explained that the United States needs to do more to identify the origins of imported fish, especially from China, to buyers in local markets. "U.S. consumers are unknowingly supporting the highly subsidized and forced-labor Chinese fish industry," Hamby said.

Council Chairman Will Sword said, "U.S. fishermen need to fish in our healthy U.S. waters. The bottom line is eating our own fish."

Manuel Dueñas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association, commented that in our region "there are no 'commercial' fishers. We are community-based fishers. The boats are owned by local families and fish for the benefit of the community."

Strong opposition to removing commercial fishing prohibitions came from multiple members of academia, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and the

Native Hawaiian Cultural Working Group. Concerns expressed were that commercial fishing would endanger protected species, ignore cultural values and harm the ecosystem.

Kanoe Morishige, Assistant Professor at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies, said, "Papahānaumokuākea is not a realm for extraction," and that "commercial extraction conflicts with what binds Hawaiians to the seascape."

Council Urged Stronger Standards for Marine Mammal Protection in Seafood Imports

The Council called on NOAA to strengthen its new Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) Import Provisions, which were published in the *Federal Register* on Sept. 2, 2025. The Council urged NOAA to apply more rigorous standards when determining whether foreign fisheries meet U.S. requirements for protecting marine mammals and reducing bycatch, and to create a clear process for public and stakeholder input.

The MMPA Import Provisions, first enacted in 1972 but never fully implemented, are designed to prevent seafood imports from countries that do not have measures comparable to

A lone U.S. longline vessel, the F/V Kawaiola, represents the livelihoods of Pacific fishers and the fresh seafood supply for island communities — issues at the heart of the Council's 204th meeting. Photo: Caleb McMahan, Hawai'i Seafood Council.

U.S. standards for reducing the incidental capture, injury or death of marine mammals.

For the first time, NOAA's Comparability Findings identified specific nations and fisheries that will be prohibited from exporting seafood to the United States beginning Jan. 1, 2026. The findings affect approximately 15% of all U.S. seafood imports. However, the restrictions do not apply to tuna longline fisheries in the Western and Central Pacific, which are of particular concern to the Council. To better understand the scope and impact of the rule, the Council also requested that NMFS evaluate the amount of tuna imports into the United States that are affected by the Comparability Findings Report.

During public comment, Eric Kingma of the Hawaii Longline Association voiced frustration with the findings that did not bar other Western and Central Pacific fisheries, citing strict requirements the Hawai'i longline fishery faces. "You're telling me that foreign distant-water longline fisheries operating around Hawai'i, in the same proximity and same fishing grounds as us, are removing hooks from false killer whales without causing serious injury? To me, that is absolutely inaccurate."



Council members Sylvan Igisomar, CNMI (middle), and Frank Perez, Guam (right), observe locally caught bigeye tuna at the Honolulu Fish Auction on Aug. 26, 2025. The Council supported efforts to strengthen the U.S. seafood industry and create a more level playing field for American fishermen.

Deep-Sea Mining in the Western Pacific

University of Hawai'i professor Jeff Drazen presented a comprehensive review of deep-sea mining that highlighted current technologies, potential ecological impacts on fish at different levels in the water column, and the significant data limitations and uncertainties that remain. There is renewed interest in extracting



Screenshot from an Impossible Metals video depicting the company's selective polymetallic nodule collection technique, detecting and avoiding marine life. Source: impossiblemetals.com.

minerals needed for battery production in both the Clarion Clipperton Zone southeast of Hawai'i and in U.S. waters off American Samoa.

Hawai'i Council member Matt Ramsey emphasized the importance of distinguishing between the different mining technologies being considered. Traditional "tractoring" methods involve large machines moving across the ocean floor, creating sediment plumes and discharges, while companies such as Impossible Metals are developing robotic arms designed to pluck individual mineral nodules from the seafloor.

"This Council banned bottom trawling in 1983, recognizing the harm," Ramsey said. "You can see how bottom trawling and the tractoring method are similar, but Impossible Metals is a different conversation. The technology and the resulting regulations may be different."

The Council directed staff to continue monitoring developments in American Samoa and to work with its advisory groups to provide information and analysis on potential impacts to fisheries and marine resources. The Council also invited NOAA to present an overview of proposed commercial recovery permit applications in the Clarion Clipperton Zone at its next meeting.

2026–2029 CNMI Bottomfish Catch Limits

The Council took initial action to set the annual catch limit (ACL) for the CNMI bottomfish fishery at 72,000 pounds and the annual catch target (ACT) at 66,000 pounds for fishing years 2026–2029. These specifications are based on the results of the NMFS 2025 stock assessment update, along with application of the Council's P* and SEEM analyses to account for scientific and management uncertainty. The ACT was set below the ACL to provide a management buffer that helps prevent the fishery from exceeding the ACL, ensuring catches remain within sustainable limits. 

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Celebrating 25 Years of Shared Stewardship in the WCPO

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO), the foundational treaty that established the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

Adopted at the Seventh Multilateral High-Level Conference (MHLC7) in Honolulu on Sept. 4, 2000, and signed the following day, the Convention set into motion a new regional framework for cooperative, science-based management of the world's largest tuna fisheries. With its entry into force in 2004, the Commission assumed competence over fisheries for highly migratory species throughout the Convention Area (see map).

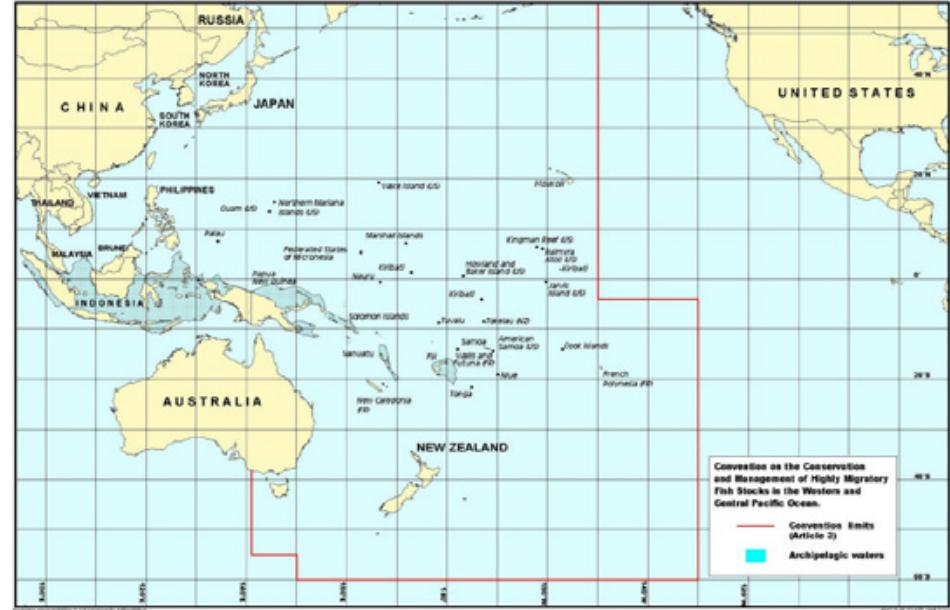


Kitty Simonds, Council executive director, and Satya Nandan, MHLC chairman, at MHLC7 in Honolulu, September 2000.

held bonds with Compact of Free Association partners the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Palau and the Marshall Islands, who are all members of the Micronesian Islands Forum. These deep regional ties helped lay the groundwork for cooperative fisheries governance during the MHLC process.

The WCPFC was created under the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement to address growing concern in the 1990s about the potential overexploitation of

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, together with the U.S. government, played a major role in negotiating and shaping the Convention. The Council has long held strong regional ties through the Pacific territories of Guam, American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Guam and the CNMI have



WCPFC Convention Area. Source: www.wcpfc.int.

valuable tuna stocks and the acceleration of industrial fishing activity across the WCPO. Its mandate — to prevent overfishing, reduce bycatch, and ensure long-term economic and ecological sustainability — remains integral to the economies and cultures of Hawai'i and the U.S. Pacific Territories. The WCPO generates nearly 60% of the world's tuna, worth an estimated \$4–7 billion (USD) each year. For many Pacific Island nations and territories, including American Samoa, tuna remains their most important natural resource and a cornerstone of long-term economic resilience.

The Council's influence on the early work of the Commission was immediate and substantial. Prior to the Convention's entry into force, the Council had already implemented some of the most progressive bycatch mitigation requirements in the world, particularly in the Hawai'i and American Samoa longline fisheries. Many of these were later adopted regionally as WCPFC conservation and management measures (CMMs), including:

- **CMM 2008-03** on sea turtle mitigation (circle hooks, line weighting and dehooking gear)
- **CMM 2012-07** on seabird mitigation based on the Hawai'i experience
- **CMM 2019-04** on shark conservation, requiring finning bans and live release

More recently, the Council's 2021 prohibition on wire leaders influenced the

Commission's adoption of **CMM 2022-04**, extending protections for sharks in longline fisheries from 20 degrees south to 2 degrees north in the WCPFC area.

The Council has also been a leader in fisheries monitoring and reporting. It was one of the world's earliest adopters of a vessel monitoring system (VMS) requirement in longline fisheries (1991) and an early proponent of human observer coverage. The WCPFC's regional VMS and observer program drew significantly from these Council-tested frameworks, helping ensure transparency and accountability in the region's tuna fisheries.

Although Honolulu was considered a logical candidate for the Commission's permanent headquarters — reflecting both U.S. logistical capacity and the Council's regional leadership — the WCPFC ultimately selected Pohnpei, FSM. Since entering into force in 2004, the Commission has organized or hosted 21 Scientific Committee, Technical and Compliance Committee and Regular Session meetings.

The WCPFC will hold its 22nd Regular Session in Manila from Dec. 1–5, 2025. As the Commission marks 25 years of the Convention, its ongoing work continues to shape the future of Pacific fisheries and the communities that depend on them.

For more information, see the Council's two Pacific Islands Fishery Monographs on the WCPFC at www.wpcouncil.org/educational-resources/education-library.



Pacific Islands Young Fishers' Training Program: Learning from the past — perpetuating our future

Guest article by Alex Min, Pacific Islands Fisheries Group

Late on a Sunday evening at Pier 38, just before midnight, five young fishers made their final preparations to board the F/V AO SHIBI IV. They would spend the next 16 hours with Capt. Tim Jones, Capt. Gary Shirakata and crew, learning firsthand about shortline fishing, bottomfishing and life aboard a commercial vessel. These participants — representing Guam; Saipan, CNMI; American Samoa; and Kaua'i and Maui, HI — were the heart of a Pacific Islands Vocational Fisher Training Program held Sept. 10-17, 2025. The program brought together experienced captains, instructors and aspiring commercial fishers to strengthen the next generation of the Pacific Islands region's fishing community.

Developed by the Pacific Islands Fisheries Group (PIFG) with industry mentors and local sponsors, the program addresses a growing need for practical, hands-on commercial fishing experience. Across the islands, many young people are eager to enter the profession but lack access to vessels, mentors and the business skills needed to make it a viable career. This intensive week was designed to bridge that gap by providing exposure, guidance and real-world training.



Training participant Dillan Cruz (left) and mentor Jon Niityama practice fiberglass repair techniques at Plas-Tech.

Over the course of seven days, participants learned what it truly means to operate as professional fishers. Early sessions focused on safety and fisheries management. Midweek brought long days at sea practicing fish handling, proper care and icing, storytelling and selling one's catch, and visiting different markets and businesses. The week culminated in an overnight trip aboard the AO SHIBI IV to learn shortline and

bottomfishing techniques. Before wrapping up, the cohort also pulled *ama ebi* (deepwater shrimp) pots, learned fiberglassing, boat care and maintenance with Plas-Tech, and completed a financial planning course with Kylen Yamakawa. They received a data collection presentation from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and were recognized for their efforts at the 204th Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council Meeting by the members and executive director.

While the week felt like a whirlwind of packed days for the participants, one shared that "what has been created by fishers in Honolulu can also be created back home in Guam," while another said he was inspired by the vision of what fishers can

achieve and hopes to do the same in his community.

Beyond gaining technical skills, the participants developed confidence, teamwork and a clearer vision for their futures. All earned CPR and first aid certifications, built new relationships with mentors and their cohort, and, perhaps most importantly, gained a deeper understanding of how to build a future in the industry that balances livelihood, culture and care of our sustainable marine resources.

As the program wrapped up, PIFG continued working with graduates through fall 2025 to conduct on-water evaluations in their home islands. These follow-ups allowed instructors to see how participants were applying the skills and knowledge gained during the training. At-sea evaluations were completed in Saipan and Guam in early October, followed by American Samoa in November.

Across the region, participants demonstrated meaningful progress. In the Mariana Islands, both trainees improved the quality of their catch by applying proper fish handling and increased icing practices learned from Magic Sportfishing. In American Samoa, the participant began gathering gear and materials to launch a small community shortline project aimed at increasing local access to fish. Each graduate also shared how they were adapting the training to their current fishing platforms and community needs.

These early outcomes reflect the program's broader goal: to support long-term development of young fishers who can build careers, contribute to local fisheries and participate more fully in management and decision-making. PIFG will continue to engage the participants as they refine their skills and help shape the future of Pacific Islands fisheries.

Programs like this demonstrate what is possible when the Pacific Islands region invests in its people. Fishing is more than an industry here — it is a way of life and a foundation of community resilience. As climate change, market shifts and regulations continue to reshape the landscape, empowering young fishers ensures that seafood supplies, traditions and cultural values remain strong.

Thank you to the Council and NMFS for investing in our Pacific Islands fishers and helping strengthen local capacity. A special mahalo to all the mentors and sponsors: Nick Chang, Lloyd Diaz, Tim Jones, Jon Moribe, Jon Niityama, Gary Shirakata, Clay Tam, Kylen Yamakawa, Adventure Bound Travel, Blue Seafood Company, Fresh Island Fish, Hawai'i Seafood Council, La'akea Fish Company, Liferaft & Marine Safety Equipment, Local I'a, Magic Sportfishing, Plas-Tech, Ltd., POP Fishing & Marine and United Fishing Agency.

For more information, visit www.fishtoday.org/commercial-fishing-training and www.wpcouncil.org/ira-projects. ➤



*Amanda Padilla and Izzic Cabrera show their *ama ebi* haul.*



Communities Share Priorities During Second Round of Navigating Change Series

Across the Western Pacific, fishermen and communities are adapting to changes in ocean conditions that affect productivity and the movement of the fish they rely on. With support from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council is helping island communities stay steady through these shifts in four main ways — all aimed at keeping our fisheries strong for our families, cultures and livelihoods.

- **Community Engagement** – working with island communities to build capacity, share knowledge and support participation in fisheries management.
- **Scenario Planning** – exploring future challenges and opportunities for Hawai‘i, American Samoa and regional small-boat fisheries.
- **Regulatory Review** – evaluating current rules to improve flexibility, efficiency and climate readiness.
- **Protected Species** – examining how changing ecosystems may affect interactions with sea turtles, seabirds, marine mammals and other protected species.

These initiatives aim to build resilient, adaptive and inclusive fisheries across the Pacific Islands region. The Council and the Pacific Islands fisheries Group (PIFG) are conducting four rounds of community consultations during 2025–2026, with October meetings held in Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI).

Guam Community Meetings: October 1-3

A second series of IRA community consultations was held in Inalahuan, Maesso’ and Sinajaña, bringing together fishers and residents to discuss climate impacts, fishing access and local management priorities.

Participants in southern Guam described increasing shark presence nearshore, with some noting sharks responding to boat noise and frequently targeting bottomfish

catches. Several linked this to potential Achang Marine Protected Area spillover and suggested rotating MPAs to allow recovery while restoring access to long-closed areas. Fishers also emphasized concerns with the Camp Blaz surface danger zones, which restrict waters over three miles from shore for 273 days of the year and complicate community derbies. Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources (DAWR) staff added context on shark behavior and ongoing monitoring.

Community members revisited the importance of cultural take of sea turtles, proposing small, culturally based permits while acknowledging federal Endangered Species Act limits. DAWR staff also provided clarifications on fish aggregating device (FAD) availability, challenges with maintenance and updates on fishing regulations and MPAs.

The Maesso’ meeting revisited local management efforts, including the Maesso’ Community-Based Fisheries Management Plan. Attendees reviewed the Achang MPAs effects on fishing, and Inalahuan Mayor Anthony Chargualaf reiterated interest in hosting a new MPA in his village to support ecosystem recovery. In Sinajaña, fishers and community leaders focused on climate-driven changes, emphasizing the need for strategies that connect observed environmental shifts to practical, community-led adaptation actions in future rounds.

CNMI Community Meetings: October 4-8

In Saipan, Tinian and Rota, fishers, vendors and residents described shared their views about limited access, rising operational costs, shark depredation and insufficient agency support.

Fish vendors on Saipan pointed to licensing delays, door-to-door sales by unpermitted sellers, and new expenses such as the \$88 monthly EBT machine fee, all of which strain small seafood businesses. Fishers raised issues with net restrictions that hinder harvest of plentiful

species such as *atulai* (bigeye scad), recommending seasonal allowances or designated areas to support food security while protecting coral. Suggestions also included raising import taxes on foreign fish and pursuing a professional fish market facility to support local vendors.

On Rota and Tinian, fishers reported severe shark depredation, more frequent gear loss and difficulty predicting migratory species due to warmer waters, strong currents and shifting winds. They emphasized redeploying FADs to offset fuel costs and improve catch efficiency. Some believed changes in fish movement could also relate to military sonar or altered water temperatures.

Tinian participants voiced concern about military-related access restrictions, especially in northern areas important for *onaga* (longtail red snapper), wahoo and seasonal *atulai*

runs. They noted that most shoreline, cliff and spearfishing takes place there and that land-based fishing is often overlooked. Participants urged mapping traditional fishing grounds to support planning and protect access tied to food security and cultural practice.

Across both Guam and the CNMI, communities stressed the need for improved licensing and enforcement support, fuel cost relief, FAD maintenance, youth training and stronger collaboration between agencies and fishers. These insights will help guide upcoming rounds of consultations as the Council works with island communities to co-develop resilient, climate-ready fisheries solutions.

Visit www.wpcouncil.org/ira-projects for more information. 



CNMI Advisory Panel member Dre Lizama (blue shirt) shares his experience with shark encounters near Tinian, Oct. 8, 2025.

Teachers Dive into Fisheries Science at 3-Day American Samoa Workshop

Supported by the Western Pacific Sustainable Fisheries Fund in partnership with DMWR



DMWR Director
Nathan Ilaoa opens
the teacher workshop
Oct. 29, 2025.

Educators from American Samoa, with 9 to 16 teachers taking part, gathered this fall for a three-day Fisheries Education Workshop designed to strengthen marine science teaching and build the next generation of ocean stewards. The workshop — held Oct. 29–30, 2025, at the H. Rex Lee Auditorium and concluding Nov. 1 at the Malaloa Marina docks — was part of the American Samoa Fisheries Training for Educators project, funded through the Sustainable Fisheries Fund (SFF XII). The initiative focuses on equipping teachers with

the tools, practical experience and locally relevant content needed to bring fisheries science into their classrooms and increase local understanding of sustainable fisheries management.

Day 1: Understanding Management, Marine Ecosystems & Local Fisheries Work

The workshop opened with presentations from the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) on topics ranging from the creel survey program to coral restoration, marine protected areas (MPAs) and fish aggregating devices (FADs). Teachers expressed particular interest in differentiating between village MPAs and the national marine sanctuary and in understanding how creel data feeds into the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council's Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) reports.

One teacher shared that her students are increasingly involved in coral restoration projects and discussed the potential for wet labs or school-based facilities to support hands-on science learning.

Day 2: Protected Species, Monuments and the Council Process

The second day began with an engaging DMWR wildlife presentation covering turtles, humpback whales and seabirds. The session sparked wide-ranging questions about protected species and local conservation efforts.

Interactive elements — including a lively Kahoot! quiz — kept the room buzzing. Conversations also turned toward marine national monuments. DMWR staff helped clarify misconceptions and explained how monument designation processes differ today, leading naturally into the Council's session on the Magnuson–Stevens Act, the bottom-up approach to fishery management and how communities can get involved.

Teachers also learned about the broad landscape of fisheries careers — from vessel operations and data collection to economics, policy and grant writing. Council staff emphasized many of these fields rely on the same core skills — writing, analytical thinking, critical thinking and problem solving — which all

connect back to the scientific methods and decision-making processes used in fisheries management. Several teachers noted that marine science courses are currently offered only as electives, underscoring the need for earlier and more sustained exposure to ocean-related fields.

The group responded enthusiastically to the Council's Speakers Bureau, seeing it as a valuable resource for bringing local scientists and fisheries specialists into their classrooms.

Day 3: Hands-On Learning at the Malaloa Marina Docks

The final day brought teachers outdoors for a highly anticipated session at the docks, where they moved through rotating stations led by DMWR staff:

- **FAD construction demonstration**, where teachers helped assemble components and learned how FADs are deployed
- **Coral restoration practice**, giving educators surface-level exposure to reef rehabilitation methods used in local waters
- **Creel survey exercises**, allowing them to practice the data collection techniques they had learned about earlier in the workshop
- **Green sea turtle necropsies**, where three turtle necropsies conducted by staff provided insight into wildlife health assessments

Educators left with a new appreciation for the depth and diversity of local fisheries work — as well as classroom resources to help translate these experiences into meaningful science lessons. As part of the project deliverables, teachers received digital and printed materials including lesson plans, videos, field guides and MPA maps to support curriculum integration.

Strengthening Capacity & Inspiring Future Stewards

The Fisheries Education Workshop reflects a growing movement in the territory to build local capacity in marine science and promote informed community participation in resource management. By supporting educators, the project directly advances the goals of the American Samoa Marine Conservation Plan, which identifies fisheries education as a critical component of sustainability.

Over three days, teachers connected with local experts, gained practical experience and explored new ways to bring fisheries science to life for their students. As one participant put it, engaging directly with the people and practices behind fisheries management “opens doors for our students — and for our community's future.” 



DMWR staff demonstrate fish biosampling techniques including otolith removal for life history studies.

Seafood & Ocean Policy Briefs



NOAA to Block Non-Compliant Tuna Imports Beginning in 2026

Starting Jan. 1, 2026, the United States will ban tuna and other seafood imports from foreign fisheries that fail



A poke counter in Hawai'i with tuna from foreign and local sources.

to meet U.S. marine mammal protection standards under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has denied comparability findings for several major tuna-exporting nations — including Ecuador, Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines — and also for certain Chinese fisheries, such as bonito

lift-net operations, which together could significantly affect U.S. supplies of canned and processed tuna. To enforce the rule, NOAA and U.S. Customs have issued HTS code lists identifying prohibited products, and countries may reapply for a comparability finding after Jan. 1, 2026.

At the same time, NMFS has agreed to reconsider several denied MMPA comparability findings after settling a lawsuit with the National Fisheries Institute, delaying the Jan. 1, 2026, import ban on blue swimming crab products from major exporting nations. This development underscores how the MMPA import rule sets a national precedent that could influence how foreign tuna and other seafood imports into the Western Pacific are evaluated — and how they compete with U.S. Pacific fisheries that already meet strict bycatch standards. The reopened review also allows stakeholder input for the first time, giving Western Pacific industry and management partners an opportunity to provide evidence and shape future import determinations that may affect regional markets.

Pacific Mineral Mining Update

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has completed Area Identification offshore American Samoa, marking the first step toward evaluating potential commercial leases for offshore critical mineral extraction. This begins a federal environmental review process but does not authorize mining, and territorial leaders continue to express strong opposition given risks to fisheries, culture and food security. BOEM also issued a Request for Information and Interest for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) to gauge public and industry input on a proposed 35-million-acre offshore mining area west of the Marianas Trench National Marine Monument. Local and indigenous communities in both territories are calling for science-based decision-making and meaningful consultation as federal interest in Pacific deep-sea mining expands. 

Congressional Corner



Despite the recent prolonged government shutdown, Congress has not sat dormant on fishery issues. Several bills have been voted on and passed by the Senate, including:

- S. 93 (Sullivan [R-AK]) - Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Amendment Act of 2025, which develops a task force and action strategy for harmful algal blooms.
- S. 216 (Sullivan [R-AK]) - Save Our Seas 2.0 Amendments Act, which amends the marine debris act to improve the marine debris program.
- S. 283 (Cruz [R-TX], co-sponsored by Schatz [D-HI]) - Illegal Red Snapper and Tuna Enforcement Act, which identifies standards for country-of-origin labeling.

These measures are currently “held at the desk,” meaning they are with the House of Representatives but have not yet been acted on to allow time for a potential House bill to pass or for additional negotiations before moving forward. S. 283 may have broader implications for Western Pacific fisheries by identifying sources of imported tunas and supporting enforcement against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Another bill recently passed was S. 2296 (Wicker [R-MS]), the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2026, which provides for the policies and authorities of the U.S. Department of Defense programs and activities. The NDAA includes Subtitle I — the FISH Act of 2025. The FISH Act of 2025 was also introduced separately as S. 688 (Sullivan [R-AK]) to establish an IUU vessel list and provide enforcement and sanctions to combat IUU fishing. The measure was incorporated into the NDAA and passed, including a provision to provide appropriations to Sea Grant through 2031. The IUU vessel list would identify vessels engaged in IUU activities and give the United States and its regional fishery management negotiators a stronger basis for sanctions and enforcement against bad actors.



The Senate also recently passed, and the House has continued moving forward, the Young Fishermen’s Development Act — S. 2357 (Sullivan [R-AK]) and H.R. 3692 (Begich [R-AK]) — which reauthorizes the Act through 2031. The Act directs the secretary of commerce to establish a program through Sea Grant to provide training, outreach and technical assistance for young fishermen. A grant program for local and regional training was launched in 2023, with funding awarded to projects in North Carolina, Massachusetts and Alaska. Funding in 2024 supported projects in Maine, Washington and Alaska. Applications for 2025 funding closed April 23, 2025, and funding decisions are anticipated soon.

Lastly, the Senate recently passed, and the House advanced, the Alaska’s Right To Ivory Sales and Tradition (ARTIST) Act — S. 254 (Sullivan [R-AK]) and H.R. 5694 (Begich [R-AK])). This bill amends the Marine Mammal Protection Act to protect the cultural practices and livelihoods of Alaska native artisans through ivory harvest and trade. The Council is keeping an eye on this bill as it may signal future protections supporting the fishing traditions and livelihoods of indigenous peoples of the Western Pacific. 

Council Family Updates

At its 204th meeting, the Council appointed the following members to the:

American Samoa Advisory Panel (AP):

- **Ray Tulafono**
- **Louis Solaita** (Alternate)

Guam AP:

- **Audrey Toves**

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands AP:

- **Dre Lizama**
- **Anthony Guerrero**
- **James Roberto** (Alternate)

Fisheries Data Collection and Research Committee Technical Committee:

- **Brett Taylor**, Research Subpanel, University of Guam
- **Felipe Carvalho**, Data Subpanel, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC)
- **Marlowe Sabater**, Data Subpanel, NMFS PIFSC

Archipelagic Plan Team:

- **Fernan Asalele**, Department of Marine & Wildlife Resources (DMWR)

Pelagic Plan Team:

- **Domingo Ochavillo**, DMWR



2025 Maui Feeding Frenzy Fishing Tournament & Donation

On Maui, 23 boats participated in a donation-focused fishing tournament organized by local fishers in collaboration with Fresh Help Maui and the Maui Trailer Boat Club. The event brought in more than 4,800 pounds of fish — including marlin, mahimahi and 'ahi — which were then distributed to more than 1,000 households.

Representing the Council's community engagement efforts, Hawai'i Advisory Panel member **Amanda Padilla** and WPRFMC staffer **Zach Yamada** participated in the event and shared outreach materials. Their presence emphasized the importance of partnerships between fishery stakeholders and local communities in supporting food security and sustainable practices.

The distribution took place on Halloween at Ma'alaea Wharf and on November 5 at two locations: Tails Up Maui (Wailuku) and the Lahaina Cannery Mall. ➜



Strengthening Island Capacity Through Education

Since its inauguration in 2014, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council's U.S. Pacific Island Fisheries Capacity-Building Scholarship Program has supported 15 students through graduation from American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and Guam. Graduates of this unique program return to their home islands to work for their local fishery management agency. This transferable model increases technical capacity in the territories, affording better local fisheries decision-making. Learn more at www.wpcouncil.org.

Current Scholarship Students

Kiana Camacho (CNMI) is completing her BS in integrative biology at the University of Guam (UOG) and anticipates graduating in spring 2026. She shared the following about her summer 2025 internship project.



This summer, I had the opportunity to work at the UOG Marine Lab under Dr. Brett Taylor, where I was introduced to a variety of fisheries research methods. Much of my work focused on learning the EventMeasure software and extracting data from underwater stereoscopic videos. Analyzing these videos allowed me to build skills in species identification and gathering fish size measurements. I was also introduced to otoliths as another tool for collecting fish data, observing firsthand how fishery-dependent samples are processed. From measuring length and weight to recording gonad/testes weights and preserving otoliths for age analysis, I gained a deeper appreciation for the detailed work that underpins fisheries science. A major highlight of my time in the lab was being surrounded by highly motivated individuals who care deeply about these resources and are committed to using sound science to improve fisheries management. It is their passion and hard work that made my time in the lab both rewarding and inspiring.

Outside the lab, I was able to see how science informs decision-making at the council level. Attending SSC and Council meetings showed me the collaborative efforts between scientists, agencies and local leaders across the Pacific, as well as the challenges of integrating diverse perspectives into management. With the guidance of Dr. Craig Severance [Council's Education Committee chair], I came to better understand the broader framework of fisheries governance and the importance of bridging science with policy. This experience not only sharpened my research skills but also reinforced my desire to contribute to the sustainable use of marine resources by connecting rigorous science with effective management.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Strengthening Capacity Through Education

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11



Christine Tominiko (American Samoa) is completing her MS in tropical conservation biology and environmental science at University of Hawai'i at Hilo (UHH) and anticipates graduating in spring 2026.

Christine is on detail for the AS Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources through the end of December 2025, filling in as an invasive species coordinator while also completing part of her degree requirements. Her work will help advance prevention and early detection protocols for invasive species.

Ami Vice (Guam) is completing her MS in biology at UOG under advisor Dr. Brett Taylor. Her project will investigate the link between life-history traits in surgeonfish (*Acanthuridae*) and responses to fishing pressures. This will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on Acanthurids and help inform management of this group. Ami anticipates graduating in spring 2026.



Previous Scholarship Recipients



Faasalafa (Diana) Kitiona (American Samoa) completed her BS in marine science at UHH and launched her career as the priority watershed coordinator for the DMWR Coral Reef Advisory Group (CRAG) in August 2017. She later served as a watershed coordinator and field technician for Ridge to Reefs beginning in 2019 before transitioning to the Council as Island Coordinator from January 2021 to May 2022.

Aphina Liusamo (American Samoa) received her BS in marine science from UHH and joined DMWR as a wildlife biologist in April 2022. She now serves as a sea turtle biologist.



Fuamai Tago (American Samoa) obtained her BS in marine science from UHH and accepted a position at DMWR as a coral reef monitoring fish ecologist in April 2022. She is presently the coral restoration coordinator.

Valentine Vaeoso (American Samoa) earned her BS in marine science from UHH and started as an intern with the National Park Service of American Samoa in September 2017, working with CRAG on coral restoration. In 2020, she became a NOAA Fellow, contributing to annual subtidal surveys for the Pacific Island Inventory & Monitoring Network, coral transplantation and invasive algae monitoring.



Source: www.changeseas.tv



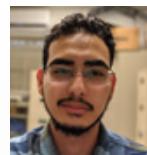
Maria Angela Dela Cruz (CNMI) graduated with a BA in marine science from UHH and joined the Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) in 2021 as a fishery data officer. She was selected as the Council's Island Coordinator in June 2024.

Carey Demapan (CNMI) received her BS in marine science from UHH and started working at DFW as a public outreach specialist for the Sea Turtle Program in March 2019. She was hired as air quality program manager for the Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality in May 2021 and returned to DFW in April 2023 as an endangered species program manager.



Keena Leon Guerrero (CNMI) completed two degrees with the Council scholarship: a BS in marine biology from Hawai'i Pacific University and an MS in marine biology from UH at Mānoa. After earning her BS, she worked in the Data Section at DFW as a biologist and ultimately became the data manager. Following her MS, she joined the Fisheries Section in December 2022 as a fisheries biologist where she manages the Life History Program.

Jude Lizama (CNMI) obtained his BA in biology from UOG and started working at DFW as a fisheries data analyst in January 2024. He is now the fisheries data section supervisor.



Frank Villagomez (CNMI) earned his MS in biology from UOG and accepted a position at DFW as a fisheries biologist in September 2019. He later served as the jurisdictional fisheries management liaison for the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center from July 2024 to February 2025, and he now leads the Coral Reef Initiative Program under the Department of Lands and Natural Resources.

Andrew Kang (Guam) received his MS in biology from UOG and joined the Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources (DAWR) in July 2023 as a biologist focused on developing a life history lab, assessing fish stocks and supporting several boat-based projects to assist local fishers.



Jeniel Mian (Guam) earned her BS in integrative biology at UOG and began working at DAWR in August 2025 as a biologist providing technical guidance for resource protection and management while supporting permitting, fishery data surveys and sea turtle projects.

Leilani Sablan Naden (Guam) earned her MS in biology from UOG and started at UOG Sea Grant in February 2023 as a fishery biologist in a new fisheries data collection program. She now leads the development of the Guam Fisheries Management Plan alongside DAWR and the local community.



Get to Know Your Council Members: Edgar Feliciano

Learn about the people who balance competing interests while trying to make fishery management decisions for the overall benefit of the nation.

Edgar Feliciano joined the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council in August 2025.

2025. A lifelong resident of American Samoa, he brings more than two decades of experience in commercial fishing and vessel management. Having started as a tuna fisherman in the late 1990s, and later managing his family's longline fleet, Edgar has deep insight into the realities of the fishing industry and the communities that depend on it.

Why did you want to become part of the Council?

I wanted to serve on the Council because I believe the people who live and work in these waters should have a strong voice in shaping the policies that affect them. Having spent most of my life on the docks and at sea, I've seen firsthand how regulations, fuel costs and market shifts impact local fishermen and their families. Joining the Council is a way to contribute that perspective and help ensure that decisions balance sustainability with the survival of our island economies, such as American Samoa, which is dependent on a thriving fishing industry.

How do you think your background and experiences in the longline industry will help you as a Council member?

My years in the longline fleet,

from crewman to fleet manager, gave me a complete, practical view of the industry. I know what a regulation means — not just on paper, but its real effect on the vessels, costs and families back home. This full perspective helps me bridge the gap between policy and real-world impact, ensuring that conservation goals are balanced with the economic realities facing our hardworking fishermen.

There are many challenges facing American Samoa's fisheries. What would you like to do or see to improve things?

American Samoa's fisheries face rising costs, limited market access and environmental challenges, but I believe we can overcome them by strengthening local support systems and investing in people. Support for shipyard services, affordable bait and fuel, and improved infrastructure — from modernized ports to better market connections — are essential. Just as important is creating training and mentorship opportunities for younger generations and fostering collaboration among fishermen, scientists and policymakers to develop practical, data-driven solutions that protect our resources while sustaining our culture and livelihoods, which rely on the fishing and the fishing industry.

What does effective fisheries management look like to you?

Effective fisheries management is a strong, self-sustaining loop. It starts with clear, practical



and science-based regulations. It means having a healthy, resilient marine ecosystem that can support the needs of our islands. Crucially, it means having a local industry that is economically stable and profitable. When fishermen can operate successfully and the fish stocks are healthy, it encourages cooperation and compliance. For me, it boils down to achieving conservation success without causing economic collapse.

And finally, what is your favorite fish to eat?

Has to be sashimi, although I also love ceviche...can't go wrong with either. 

New Outreach Resources

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council has managed bottomfish in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands since 1986. To help the public better understand the fishery, the Council developed a diagram to illustrate bottomfish gear and approximate habitats for a few of the targeted species. It also includes fishing regulations in place should restrictions under the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and Sanctuary be lifted.

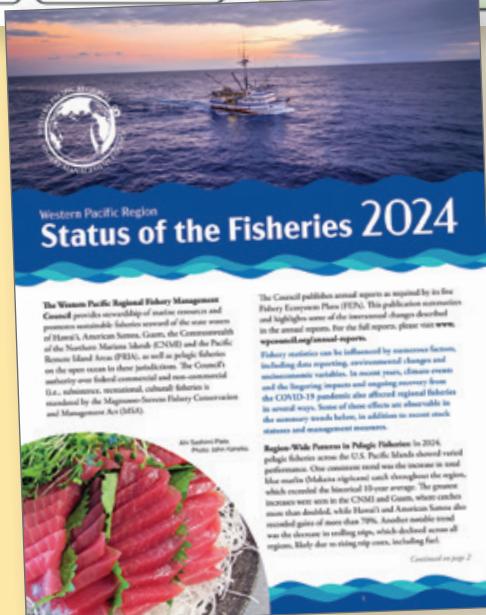
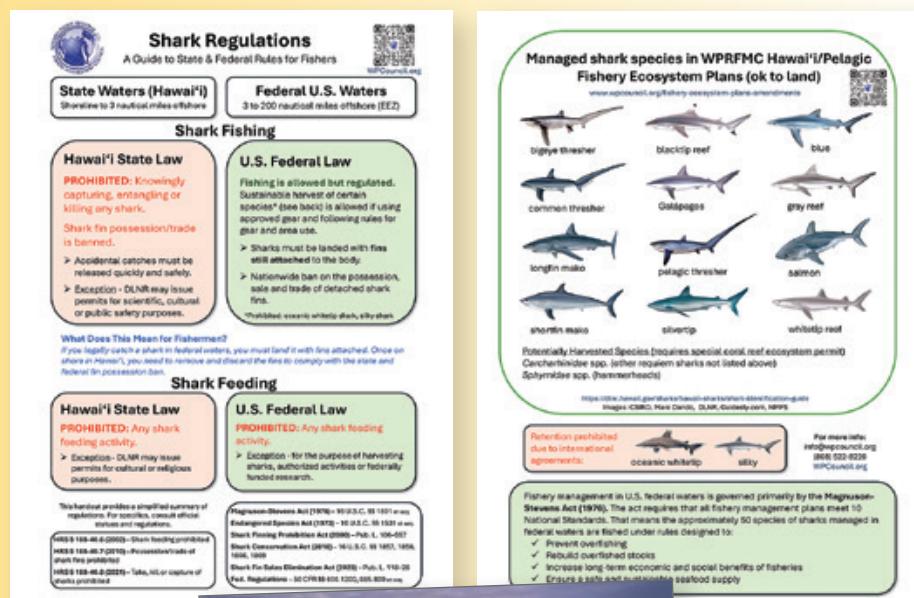
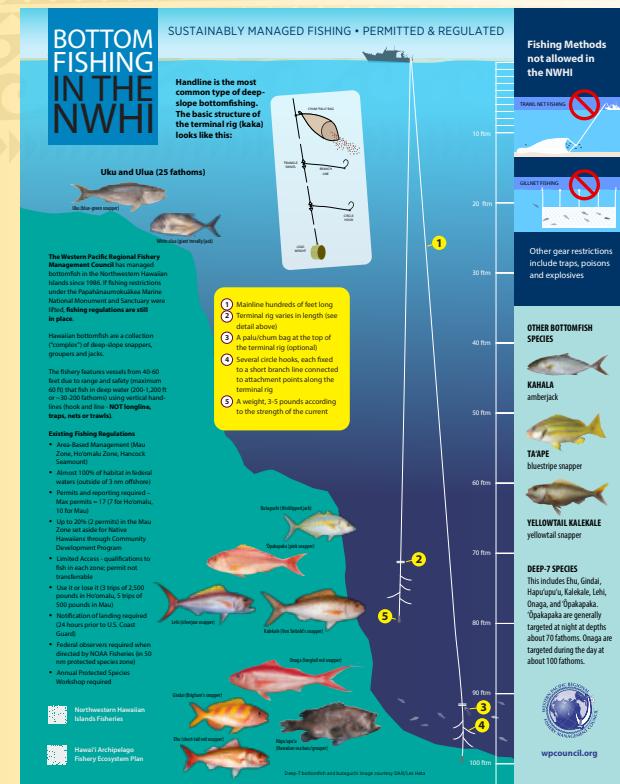
Find the display at www.wpcouncil.org/nwhi-fisheries-2.

Shark depredation — when sharks damage or remove catch from fishing gear — has become a major challenge for Pacific Island small-boat fisheries. Fishers report that almost half to three-fourths of their catch are lost to depredation, forcing fishers to explore new areas with little relief. Many say the problem is worsening and even influences their decision to go fishing.

To help reduce confusion about shark regulations, the Council created handouts that provide a side-by-side comparison of fishing and feeding rules in state/local waters versus federal waters. The first versions for Hawai‘i and Guam are now available, with CNMI and American Samoa editions currently in development: www.wpcouncil.org/hot-topics.

The Council has released its *Western Pacific Region Status of the Fisheries 2024* report, offering a snapshot of how U.S. Pacific Island fisheries have evolved from 2022 to 2024. The report explores trends influenced by environmental and economic shifts — as well as major climate events and the region's continued COVID-19 recovery — and provides the latest stock updates and management highlights.

Find the *Status of the Fisheries* and full reports at www.wpcouncil.org/annual-reports. To access the data used to generate the reports, go to www.wpcouncildata.org.



2025-2026 Council Calendar

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



DECEMBER

9-11

158th Scientific & Statistical Committee (SSC) meeting (virtual)

15

Executive & Budget Standing Committee (SC) meeting

15

Program Planning SC meeting

16-17

205th Council meeting (virtual)

FEBRUARY

Feb 28 - Mar 6

International Sea Turtle Symposium, Kona, HI*

MARCH

9-13

159th SSC meeting (tent)

16-20

206th Council meeting, Mariana Islands (tent)

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

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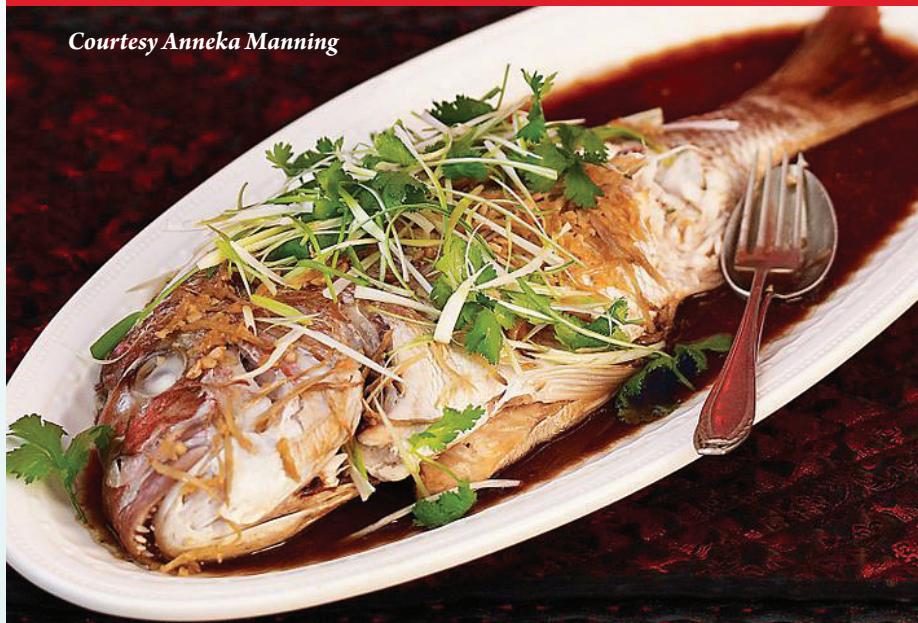
[YouTube youtube.com/wpcouncil](https://www.youtube.com/wpcouncil)



Recipe

Baked Shoyu Snapper

Courtesy Anneka Manning



Ingredients

1 3 to 4-lb whole snapper, scaled, cleaned
1 tbsp oil
3-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled, finely shredded
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1/4 cup soy sauce
1/4 cup chicken stock
2 tbsp sugar
3 tsp sesame oil
2 tbsp peanut oil
1 cup green onions, chopped
aluminum foil



Instructions

1. Grease deep baking pan with oil.
2. Score fish on both sides and place in pan.
3. Rub fish with shredded ginger and garlic.
4. Mix soy sauce, chicken stock, sugar and sesame oil in a small bowl until sugar has dissolved; pour mixture over fish.
5. Cover fish tightly with aluminum foil and bake at 425°F for 45-50 minutes, or until fish flakes easily with fork.
6. Heat peanut oil in saucepan until smoking; pour over fish.
7. Garnish fish with green onions and serve with rice.

Upcoming Events

The 158th Scientific & Statistical Committee (SSC) meeting will be held Dec. 9-11, 2025, virtually with host sites for Webex at 1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400, Honolulu, HI; Tedi of Samoa Bldg., Suite 208B, Fagatogo Village, AS; BRI Bldg., Suite 205, Kopa Di Oru St., Garapan, Saipan, CNMI; Cliff Pointe, 304 W. O'Brien Drive, Hagatña, Guam. <https://tinyurl.com/158SSCMtg>.

Major agenda items include: Restoring commercial fishing in the Marianas Trench, Rose Atoll and Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monuments (action item); State of science on open-ocean marine protected areas and regional impacts; Endangered Species Act (ESA) review of HI deep-set longline (DSLL) fishery on oceanic whitetip sharks and leatherback turtles; False killer whale abundance estimate update; SSC Special Projects Working Group reports; and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) project updates.

The 205th meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will be held Dec. 16-17, 2025, virtually with host sites for Webex (listed above). <https://tinyurl.com/205CouncilMtg>.

Major agenda items include: Commercial fishing in the Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument recommendations (final action); Restoring commercial fishing in the Marianas Trench, Rose Atoll and Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monuments (initial action); 2026-2029 CNMI bottomfish annual catch limit specifications (final action); ESA review of HI DSLL fishery on oceanic whitetips and leatherbacks; Vessel electronic monitoring plan review; 2025 Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission meeting outcomes; and IRA project updates.

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 December 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/205CouncilMtgActions>.

1. 2026–2029 CNMI Bottomfish ACL Specifications – Final Action

The Council will consider taking final action on annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs) for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) bottomfish fishery for 2026 to 2029, based on a 2025 stock assessment update indicating the stock is not overfished or experiencing overfishing.

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 (Social, Economic, Ecological and Management uncertainties) score (35%).
- Specify the ACL and ACT more conservatively than the revised scores (P*< 40% and 35%).

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

The Council will consider taking final 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 U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) between 50–200 nautical miles (nm).

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.

3. Recommendations for Commercial Fishing Regulations in the Papahānaumokuākea, Rose Atoll, and Marianas Trench Marine National Monuments – Initial Action

In response to Executive Order 14276, “Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness,” (April 17, 2025) the Council is reviewing options related to the current commercial fishing prohibitions in the Papahānaumokuākea, Rose Atoll and Marianas Trench Marine National Monuments. The EO directs federal agencies to evaluate existing restrictions and consider changes that could support sustainable U.S. seafood production while maintaining conservation goals.

Following its September 2025 action to provide recommendations to the secretary of commerce, the Council is now evaluating potential revisions to fishing regulations in the monuments in anticipation of possible federal action to lift commercial fishing prohibitions. At this meeting, the Council will consider options that include:

- No action, retaining all existing commercial fishing prohibitions.
- Restoring commercial fishing by removing current prohibitions.
- Revising existing management measures to allow commercial fishing while adding new or updated measures appropriate for current or potential fishing activity.

These options would guide potential future amendments to the Council’s Fishery Ecosystem Plans should the administration proceed with removing fishing prohibitions in the monuments. 



Dedicated
to ecosystem-
based fisheries
management in
the U.S. Pacific
Islands.

Modernizing Fisheries Management to Keep U.S. Seafood Competitive



The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council delivered a comprehensive set of recommendations to the secretary of commerce and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), aiming to restore American seafood competitiveness in the U.S. Pacific Islands under Executive Order 14276. Finalized at the Council's 204th meeting in September 2025, the recommendations focus on reducing regulatory burdens and increasing domestic production to stabilize markets, improve access, boost economic profitability and prevent fishery closures.

The region's fisheries are diverse, culturally important and vital to the U.S. seafood supply. The Hawai'i longline fishery provides nearly two-thirds of the domestic supply of fresh, high-quality bigeye and yellowfin tuna and more than half the swordfish supply. The American Samoa longline fishery supplies albacore tuna to the single remaining cannery in the only U.S. territory south of the equator.

The Hawai'i longline fishery provides nearly two-thirds of the domestic supply of fresh, high-quality bigeye and yellowfin tuna and more than half the swordfish supply. The American Samoa longline fishery supplies albacore tuna to the single remaining cannery in the only U.S. territory south of the equator.

Meanwhile, small-scale bottomfish, pelagic and crustacean fisheries in Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) generate high value to local communities and seafood markets.

For nearly 50 years since the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) was enacted, the Council has strived to minimize burdens on the region's fisheries as much as possible to ensure these fisheries provide the maximum benefit to the region and the nation. Many federal burdens stem from other laws, including the Endangered

Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). Small-scale fisheries in the territories also face data limitations, making it difficult to meet the MSA's annual catch limit (ACL) requirements. The Council's recommended actions reflect these realities, and many will require action from NMFS and/or Congress.

MSA Actions with Nexus to the Antiquities Act

A top Council priority is removing unnecessary commercial fishing restrictions in the marine national monuments and returning management to the Council under the MSA. This would allow U.S. fishermen to operate closer to home, reducing fuel and supply costs, as well as providing access to fish in areas where they do not have to compete with foreign fishing vessels.

The Council is evaluating options for managing commercial fishing in the Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument following President Trump's April 17, 2025, proclamation lifting the monument's fishing ban. Removing fishing prohibitions in the remaining monuments (Marianas Trench, Muliāva [Rose] Atoll, and Papahānaumokuākea) would require presidential action. In the meantime, the Council has begun analyzing options for removing commercial fishing regulations and assessing potential impacts. These actions will be discussed further at the Council's 205th meeting in December.

MSA Actions + Antiquities Act

Recommended Action	How the Action Stabilizes Markets, Improves Access, Enhances Economic Profitability and Prevents Closures
Remove commercial fishing prohibitions in the three remaining Pacific Island monuments (Marianas Trench, Muliāva [Rose] Atoll, and Papahānaumokuākea) and return fishery management regulations to the MSA.	Provides the U.S. fishing fleet access to areas closer to home, thereby alleviating the increasing costs of fuel and supplies. Provides access to over 778,000 square miles of U.S. waters, reducing competition with foreign vessels operating on the high seas and contributing to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

Photo above: Swordfish landed by the Hawai'i longline fleet being prepared for auction in Honolulu, January 2020.

MSA Actions with Nexus to ESA Biological Opinions

Several recommendations focus on removing regulations tied to ESA biological opinions (BiOps). These include:

- Reducing the penalties tied to sea turtle trip interaction limits in the Hawai‘i shallow-set longline (SSLL) fishery
- Eliminating fishery closures linked to the leatherback turtle interaction hard cap in the SSLL fishery
- Reducing operational burdens by removing blue-dyed bait from required seabird mitigation measures in the SSLL fishery
- Removing an impractical sea turtle mitigation gear requirement in the American Samoa longline fishery

These recommendations aim to ensure these fisheries can continue providing fish while maintaining sufficient protection and management of affected species. The requirements targeted for removal were implemented as conditions of BiOp reasonable and prudent measures (RPMs), but the Council determined these measures are not likely to provide meaningful conservation benefit beyond existing protections and instead create unnecessary burden for the fleet.

The Council has a long history of addressing protected species interactions, and core conservation measures will remain in place. Hawai‘i and American Samoa longline fisheries managed under the Pelagic Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) already operate under strict permit and reporting rules, federal observer coverage, handling and release training, and bycatch mitigation measures. Circle hook and bait rules introduced in 2004 reduced sea turtle interactions by up to 90%. Data from 100% observer coverage show that most loggerhead and leatherback turtles in the SSLL fishery are released alive, and crews are trained to maximize survival. The Council reviews protected species interactions annually to assess the need for management updates or further research.

Additional details on these recommendations are provided in the table below.

CONTINUED FROM FIRST COLUMN

Recommended Action	Rationale
Remove the requirement to use blue-dyed bait in the Hawai‘i SSLL fishery, which was required as a primary seabird mitigation measure through a BiOp RPM.	Blue-dyed bait necessitates thawing the frozen bait before soaking it in dye prior to setting, creating operational burdens . Removing this requirement would reduce the cost and time burden incurred by the SSLL fishery.
Remove the American Samoa longline sea turtle mitigation measure requiring a specific longline gear configuration (e.g., 30-meter float lines, 70-meter distance to the first branch line) aimed at setting hooks deeper than 100 meters.	The American Samoa longline fishery faces economic hardship. Restrictions on gear configuration limit flexibility and suppress operational efficiency , contributing to less cost and economic stability .
Conduct a comprehensive review of FEP fishing regulations tied to BiOp RPMs to evaluate if they should be revised, updated, or removed.	A comprehensive review would identify areas of unnecessary burden and inefficiencies . Improving protected species handling and associated measures may improve operational efficiency and safety for fishermen, contributing to increased economic profitability .

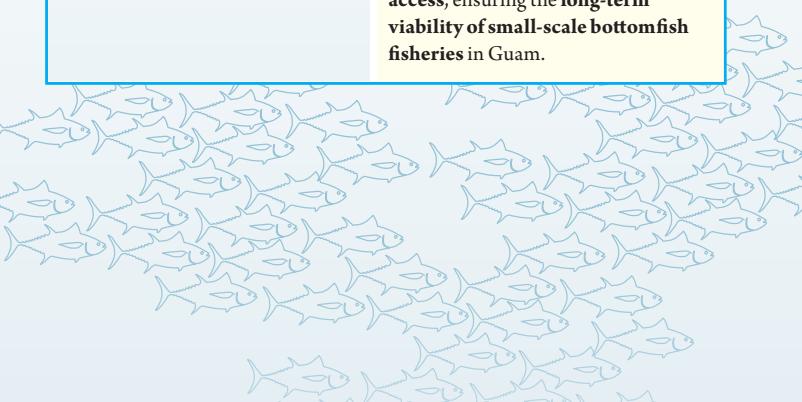
MSA Actions through the Council Process

The Council identified three MSA regulatory actions that could give the region’s fisheries more flexibility by making changes to the FEPs or related regulations.

Recommended Action	Rationale
Remove the swordfish retention limit (currently 25 swordfish per trip) in the Hawai‘i deep-set longline (DSLL) fishery when a NMFS observer is not onboard.	Removing the trip limit would eliminate regulatory discards of marketable swordfish caught in the DSLL fishery and allow vessels to land and sell all marketable swordfish.
Provide flexibility in the application of ACL requirements for data-limited stocks by amending the National Standard 1 Guideline for data-poor exemption and removing the 3-year cycle for benchmark assessments in FEPs.	Forcing ACLs on data-poor, small-scale stocks drains limited federal resources and impedes the development of underutilized fisheries . Provides opportunities to perpetuate culturally important fisheries and prevents unwarranted closures based on unsuitable maximum sustainable yield (MSY)-based science.
Remove the Guam large vessel (>50 feet) bottomfish prohibited area through an amendment to the Mariana Archipelago FEP.	The restriction, intended to prevent conflict with large vessel expansion, is moot as large vessel expansion is not anticipated. Removal promotes economic efficiency and equitable access , ensuring the long-term viability of small-scale bottomfish fisheries in Guam.

Recommended Action	Rationale
Remove the SSLL “strike two” provision of the sea turtle trip interaction limit measure implemented in 2020. This provision currently prohibits a vessel from SSLL fishing for the remainder of the year if it hits its trip limit twice.	The “strike two” provision creates unnecessary cost to the industry by imposing a punitive limit with minimal conservation benefit, as nearly all turtles are released alive. Removal would help to stabilize markets by ensuring a consistent supply of fresh swordfish throughout the season.
Remove the leatherback turtle fleet-wide interaction limit (hard cap) for the Hawai‘i SSLL fishery through an amendment to the Pelagic FEP and associated regulatory changes.	A hard cap closure can be highly disruptive, potentially closing the seasonal swordfish fishery early and delaying the start of the next fishing season. The potential closure creates unnecessary uncertainty in the market stability for swordfish, a fishery that supplies half the domestic swordfish market.

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MSA Procedural and Policy Changes

Other recommendations would require NMFS-led policy or regulatory changes.

Recommended Action	Rationale
Develop a NMFS policy directive and framework to implement any future Take Reduction Plan measures through the Council process and rulemaking procedures.	Prevents MMPA regulations from circumventing the transparency and flexibility afforded by the MSA process and consideration of the 10 National Standards. This ensures fisheries can operate at their optimum level and are not put at a competitive disadvantage.
Revise NMFS procedure for initiating Secretarial review of Council actions (Procedures 01-101-01 and 01-101-03) to ensure timely implementation within the 95-110-day window specified in MSA Sections 304(a) and 305(b).	Addresses systemic delays caused by NMFS policy directives controlling transmittal dates, which have previously led to unwarranted Hawai'i longline fishery closures (e.g., 237-day closure in 2018). Timely implementation provides greater stability for fisheries.
Provide an exemption to EFH for man-made and degraded environments by amending the MSA or revising 50 CFR 600, Subpart J.	Removes barriers (costly and time-consuming consultations, unreasonable mitigation recommendations) that delay or stop necessary repairs and construction of piers, harbors and boat ramps used for fishing activities, thereby increasing domestic fishing activity .
Provide support for unfunded mandates under the MSA and other statutes, specifically funding for marine education, training and demonstration projects in the Western and Northern Pacific.	Allows for capacity building in fisheries and infrastructure, increasing seafood production . Provides opportunities for market development, increased fish catches and a greater supply of fishermen for a greying fleet.

Actions Under Other Applicable Laws

Fisheries managed under the Council's FEPs must also follow regulations and procedures required by the ESA and MMPA. For example, the Hawai'i longline fishery faces additional spatial closures and gear rules under the False Killer Whale Take Reduction Plan (FKWTRP). ESA listings and take prohibitions also impact communities, especially for species on a recovery trajectory. The Billfish Conservation Act limits the sale of billfish, and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Implementation Act, Tariff Act and Lacey Act place U.S. fisheries at a competitive disadvantage in the international market.

The Council recommended actions to reduce these burdens.

Recommended Action	Rationale
Remove the Southern Exclusion Zone closure from FKWTRP regulations.	The Southern Exclusion Zone has no clear conservation benefit but displaces fishing effort, increasing operational costs. It forces U.S. vessels onto the high seas, increases competition with foreign fleets,

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Recommended Action	Rationale
	and ironically concentrates risk for interaction with other protected species.
Revise the MMPA Guidelines for Assessing Marine Mammal Stocks (GAMMS) and the NMFS Serious Injury Determination Policy. Also calls for a statutory change to remove the Zero Mortality Rate Goal.	Precautionary assumptions in GAMMS and the policy that treats serious injuries as 100% mortality led to overestimated fishery impacts and unrealistic management goals, placing undue burden on commercial fisheries.
Remove the weak hook requirement from the FKWTRP regulations for the Hawai'i DSLL fishery, focusing instead on measures that incentivize crew to cut the line as close to the hook as possible.	Eliminates the restriction on hook type, allowing fishermen to use hooks that optimize target catch rates . Incentivizing line cutting over dangerous hook straightening would also improve crew safety and potentially reduce time spent responding to FKW interactions.
Revise ESA listings where populations are increasing and threats do not pose immediate danger of extinction , specifically mentioning green sea turtles, olive ridley turtles, North Pacific loggerhead turtles, and oceanic whitetip sharks.	Reduces unnecessary regulatory burdens , frequency, time, and resources needed for ESA Section 7 consultations, as well as associated impractical RPMs. Provides greater flexibility in managing interactions and reduces costs.
Eliminate or relax ESA take prohibition rules for threatened sea turtles (4(d) rules) to provide greater flexibility for management.	Revision to 4(d) rules to provide blanket exemptions for incidental take in commercial fisheries would reduce regulatory burden on longline fisheries. This approach avoids fishery closures and supports crew safety.
Provide more discretion to the Secretaries of Commerce and the Interior to not designate ESA critical habitat when there is little conservation benefit anticipated.	Limits consultation backlogs for federal fisheries and litigation over critical habitat cases. Reduces unnecessary regulatory burden and prevents delays in fishery infrastructure repairs and development.
Streamline ESA consultations to ensure efficient environmental reviews are completed within the statutory 135-day timeframe . Also, ensure RPMs are "reasonable" and do not create additional regulatory burdens.	Prevents lengthy delays (e.g., consultations taking over four years) that stall management actions intended to reduce burdens and lead to unnecessary fishery closures . Delays also cause significant uncertainty in investment in the affected fisheries.
Implement a statutory change to update the ESA Citizen Suits provision (e.g., capping attorney fees, limiting injunctions) to reduce incentives for litigation against U.S. fisheries.	Reduces litigation risk that can shut down sustainably managed U.S. fisheries. Prevents closures due to court orders, which exacerbate the seafood trade deficit by replacing domestic product with less-regulated foreign imports.
Provide a statutory exemption for Pacific Island fishermen to the amended Billfish Conservation Act of 2018 , reverting to the 2012 version that allowed billfish sale to U.S. markets.	Allows U.S. fishermen to sell billfish from non-overfished stocks to domestic markets, helping to reduce the seafood deficit . The exemption would permit the sale of more than half a million pounds of sustainably caught billfish annually, totaling \$2.5 million in economic value .

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A top Council priority is removing unnecessary commercial fishing restrictions in the marine national monuments and returning management to the Council under the MSA.

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Recommended Action	Rationale
Renegotiate COFA to include stipulations requiring recipient nations to support and cooperate with U.S. fisheries at international commissions (WCPFC).	Ensures that COFA recipient nations, who receive substantial U.S. aid, do not conflict with or undermine U.S. fisheries policies, thereby protecting U.S. economic interests in the region.
Develop procedures to ensure that U.S. positions in WCPFC negotiations consistently follow the provisions of the Ensuring Access to Pacific Fisheries Act , maximizing opportunities for U.S. vessels.	Ensures U.S. positions do not disadvantage U.S. fishermen relative to other WCPFC members. Prevents conservation and management measures like restrictive catch limits that are inconsistent with U.S. capacity and limit opportunity.
Implement a statutory change under the Lacey Act to provide stronger provisions limiting imports of fish products by removing exceptions for seafood harvested on the high seas or under Tuna Convention Acts.	Utilizes the Lacey Act to prohibit or limit imports of fish products (e.g., tuna) from competing nations that lack comparable legal accountability for species of concern. This “levels the playing field” for U.S. fisheries and stabilizes markets against cheaper, less-regulated foreign products.
Implement a statutory change to streamline the application process for antidumping and countervailing duties investigations under the Tariff Act, allowing petitioners to refine the scope later and relaxing the initial requirement for representing the majority of the affected industry.	Reduces the complex administrative burden for U.S. fishing industry representatives (often small business owners) in bringing cases forward against unfair trade practices, which in turn would enhance economic profitability of U.S. seafood products.

Next Steps

The Council sent its recommendations to NMFS Sept. 24, 2025. The Council also directed staff to work with NMFS on a plan and schedule for MSA actions that can move through the Council process. A report was expected at the December meeting, but coordination has been delayed due to the federal government shutdown.



A net full of tuna being unloaded at StarKist Samoa in Pago Pago.



Crew members aboard the F/V Fetuolemoana demonstrate baiting circle hooks for a longline set.