



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE
204th MEETING OF THE
WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

September 16-17, 2025 Council Plenary

Ala Moana Hotel

Garden Lanai

Honolulu, O'ahu, Hawai'i

Approved by Council:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William Sword', written over a horizontal line.

William Sword, Chair

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council

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I. Welcome and Introductions

The following members of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council were in attendance:

- Taulapapa William Sword, chair (American Samoa)
- Roger Dang, vice chair (Hawai‘i)
- Sylvan Igisomar, vice chair (Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and CNMI Department of Lands and Natural Resources (CNMI DLNR))
- Nathan Ilaoa, acting vice chair, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR)
- Chelsa Muña, acting vice chair, Guam Department of Agriculture (DOAG)
- Edgar Feliciano (American Samoa)
- Pedro Itibus (CNMI)
- Francisco Perez (Guam)
- Matthew Ramsey (Hawai‘i)
- Jesse Rosario (Guam)
- Gerald Weaver (CNMI)
- Sarah Malloy, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO)
- David Sakoda, Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources (Hawai‘i DLNR) (designee for Dawn Chang)
- Lt. Cmdr. Matt Guanci, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) (designee for Rear Adm. Sean Regan, commander for USCG Oceania District)
- Sean Macduff, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- Rachel Ryan, U.S. State Department

Also in attendance were Council Executive Director Kitty M. Simonds; Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) designees Erik Franklin and Jason Helyer; and Keith Hagg, Elena Onaga, Christine Terada, and Frederick Tucher from the NOAA General Counsel Pacific Islands (GCPI).

II. Oath of Office

Malloy swore in new Council members Rosario and Feliciano and reappointed Council member Sword into office.

III. Approval of the 204th Council Meeting Agenda

Sword asked for a motion to approve the 204th meeting agenda.

Moved by Ilaoa, seconded by Perez.

Motion passed.

IV. Approval of the 203rd Council Meeting Minutes

Sword asked for a motion to approve the 203rd meeting minutes.

Moved by Igisomar, seconded by Ilaoa.

Motion passed.

V. Executive Director's Report

Simonds opened the 204th Council meeting by welcoming attendees and commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Honolulu Convention, which created the international framework for managing highly migratory fish stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. She highlighted the Council's historic role in hosting the last four multilateral high-level conferences that led to its signing and noted the convention's global importance; managing 60% of the world's tuna supply, including support for the Hawai'i and American Samoa fisheries. Simonds reflected on the Council's long-standing contributions to conservation and management with the commission, such as developing measures to protect turtles, birds and sharks, and conducting workshops for vessel owners and fishermen. She also recalled missed opportunities for hosting the convention's secretariat in Honolulu, which could have strengthened the U.S. presence in Pacific fisheries governance. Simonds outlined key priorities for the upcoming annual meeting of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) in December, including ensuring the continued viability of American Samoa's longline fishery through the adoption of a management procedure for South Pacific albacore, an essential step for maintaining Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification and fair market prices. She also highlighted the goal of developing a bigeye tuna management procedure by 2026 to prepare for renegotiating catch limits for Hawai'i's longline fleet.

Simonds summarized the Council family discussion held Aug. 27, 2025, with NMFS Assistant Administrator Eugenio Piñeiro-Soler, who emphasized the Trump Administration's priorities of supporting U.S. fisheries through cooperative research programs, electronic monitoring (EM) and addressing issues such as marine spatial closures and protected species. Council members from various jurisdictions raised issues about equitable international representation, access to U.S. exclusive economic zones (EEZs), Endangered Species Act (ESA) listings, territorial recognition and the need for NMFS to uphold the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) as the guiding framework for fisheries management. Members expressed optimism about NMFS's new leadership, noting Soler's approachable style and his support for culturally grounded initiatives, drawing from his experience as a fisherman, former council chair and as an islander.

Simonds also addressed the Aug. 8, 2025, U.S. District Court ruling that invalidated NMFS's letter removing commercial fishing prohibitions within the Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument (PIHMNM) expansion area and noted that the Council is set to discuss next steps.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) comparability findings were published Sept. 2, 2025, marking progress toward enforcing the seafood import ban on foreign sources that exceed U.S. marine mammal protection standards. The ban will take effect Jan. 1, 2026, four years later than originally planned.

Simonds noted the Council's presentation at the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) annual meeting Sept. 8, 2025, describing regional challenges such as shark depredation, false killer whale (FKW) assessments and large-area closures.

The Council's ongoing community engagement under the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) programs will go through a second round of meetings and workshops throughout the region in October and November. The grant is set to conclude at the end of 2026.

Simonds closed her report with a tribute to Gov. Arnold Palacios, a respected Council family member and leader from the CNMI who passed away in July, honoring his decades of dedication to sustainable fisheries and island communities.

VI. Agency Reports

A. National Marine Fisheries Service

1. Pacific Islands Regional Office

Malloy presented the PIRO report, starting with two separate updates on PIRO's actions taken in support of deep-sea mining for critical minerals. In response to the Bureau of Energy Management (BOEM) request for information on the lease request in the U.S. EEZ around American Samoa, NOAA submitted a letter with considerations regarding how deep-sea mining could interact with NMFS trust resources, including fisheries and protected resources. NMFS is actively coordinating with BOEM on this process as it goes forward, including PIRO staff joining the bureau in American Samoa this week to discuss the territory lease request. Second, NOAA National Ocean Service (NOS) is managing the process for lease requests on the high seas area known as the Clarion Clipperton Zone (CCZ) between Hawai'i and California. NOS is undertaking an interagency consultation with NMFS and other agencies for two license requests, with the possibility of six in total. Similar to the BOEM letter, NMFS will provide a letter to NOS on how deep-sea mining operations could interact with fisheries in that area.

Deep Seabed Hard Mineral Resources Act regulations instruct the NOAA administrator to consult with regional fishery management councils (RFMCs) if the action could adversely affect any fishery within the U.S. EEZ or any anadromous species or continental shelf fishery resource subject to the exclusive management of the United States beyond the EEZ. NMFS is working with NOS on how to interpret the continental shelf fishery provision of the regulations as it applies to Hawai'i and the territories, but there is potential for direct consultation with the Council on these high seas permits.

NMFS published two rulemakings since the change of the administration. As with each change of administration, the process for issuing rulemaking slows down to allow them to settle and then speeds through the process once they have become accustomed. In July 2025, the final coral critical habitat designation was published. NMFS also published the proposed rule for the Hawai'i deep-sea bottomfish annual catch limits (ACLs).

Regarding international fisheries, PIRO attended the joint Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)-WCPFC working group meeting on bluefin tuna in July and the WCPFC Northern Committee meeting in Japan, where issues regarding striped marlin, swordfish management strategy evaluation and the South Pacific albacore were discussed. PIRO also attended the first South Pacific albacore management workshop held Sept. 10-11, 2025, which was a first step toward developing management procedures later in the year. PIRO will attend several upcoming meetings and workshops, including the Permanent Advisory Committee to Advise the U.S. Commissioners to the WCPFC (PAC) meeting scheduled for Oct. 6-8, 2025.

Regarding protected species, NMFS is still reviewing rulemakings to list giant clams under the ESA, establish green sea turtle critical habitat and prohibit take of oceanic whitetip sharks (OWTs). NMFS is preparing documents to reinitiate ESA section 7 consultation on the authorization of the Hawai‘i deep-set longline fishery as a result of exceeding the incidental take authorization for OWTs and leatherback sea turtles. A copy of the draft biological evaluation has been provided to the Council for review.

Regarding sustainable fisheries, PIRO assisted NOAA in completing the review process for the marine national monuments under Executive Order (EO) 14276 “Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.” EO 14276 section 4(h) instructs the secretary of commerce in consultation with the Department of the Interior to review all the monuments to provide recommendations to the president of any areas that could be open to commercial fishing. This topic will be further discussed later in the agenda.

In August 2025, NMFS finalized a grant to the PSMFC for the EM effort over the next three years.

Malloy highlighted organizational changes starting with Jason Philibotte, former head of PIRO’s International Fisheries Division, who is no longer with the agency. Alex Kahl has been named as acting International Fisheries Division chief.

Ilaoa asked what considerations are being given to the requests made by the territorial governors regarding the ESA actions under review. He said the critical habitat designations will likely present costly permitting requirements for American Samoa resulting in a roadblock to economic development. These actions also ignore local and ecological knowledge and do not provide the agencies in the territories with the level of management they need.

Malloy acknowledged the letters and said the points made were given careful consideration when NMFS delivered the draft regulatory package. All the expressed concerns weigh paramount in the consideration NMFS gives to the impact of these regulations, and now it is a matter of waiting for the administration’s decision.

Ilaoa asked what consideration is being given to the American Samoa governor’s request to allow commercial fishing within the monument in the U.S. EEZ around American Samoa, and if a determination has been made on whether the governor’s request aligns with the April 2025 EO and proclamation.

Malloy acknowledged the letters from the American Samoa and CNMI governors and said both letters were part of the information and data PIRO used to compile the recommendations submitted to NOAA and the Department of Commerce (DOC) for consideration.

Ilaoa asked whether the agency is pushing to grant the request in alignment with the administration's EO.

Malloy said PIRO was responsible for the analysis to provide the recommendations. She said the agency understands the charge to consider whether commercial fishing was appropriate given the historical resources, but PIRO needs to explain the entire context with specific references to the economic contribution of fisheries and why allowing commercial fishing would be an important feature of monument management. Those that receive the documents make the ultimate political decision on how to proceed.

Ilaoa emphasized the governor's position that the fisheries are vital to the territory of American Samoa, as they are its main economic driver. The governor also believes that monuments are not necessary if the MSA National Standards are followed. Ilaoa asked for updates on PIRO's prior commitment to redoubling the efforts to find funding for the territories in light of the territories no longer being able to transfer their bigeye quota to Hawai'i longline fisheries.

Malloy said the new administration requested NMFS to identify ideas and concepts for economic development. NMFS focused on potential projects including fisheries and commercial fishing in the territories. The funding situation in the federal government has changed, and NMFS has no further updates on whether submitted efforts will be funded.

Ilaoa acknowledged the current funding situation and said he was curious what exactly was done to redouble the effort to find some sort of fishery development money, noting that the Sustainable Fisheries Fund (SFF) is the only current fishery development funding mechanisms for American Samoa.

Malloy said NMFS met with the Office of Insular Affairs on possible funding through its grant process, and results revealed none. Malloy then spoke to Piñeiro-Soler about the issue of funding and how important it is to provide funding for the territories, and he was receptive. Until NMFS is clear on the budgets and allocations that will be given to different priorities, no promises will be made on any particular funding.

Sword asked if there is anything in the 2026 budget for the fisheries development.

Malloy said NMFS does not have any 2026 budget allocations at this time.

Sword asked if anything has been proposed for FY2027.

Malloy said NMFS is only in possession of the president's budget that has been made public. NMFS has a House mark and Senate subcommittee mark with nothing finalized, with a possible government shutdown if no agreement is made by the end of September 2025.

Sword said he is glad that NMFS is conducting studies on deep-sea mining, as this may be American Samoa's potential future as an alternate economy, but there is a need to ensure no negative impacts to American Samoa and its fisheries. Sword expressed concerns about critical habitat designations, noting the importance of potable water to the territories and potential conflict with where desalination plant intakes and outfalls may be located at the end of the reefs. The voices of residents in each territory do not seem to be heard, as 99% of the comments on the proposed rule came from people outside of the territories.

Igisomar asked if NMFS can share its recommendation on the monuments to the Council.

Malloy said it is under review and was not certain if it had been accepted as final, but she will inquire with NOAA if it can be shared with the Council.

2. Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center

Charles Littnan presented the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) report. Scientists conducted National Coral Reef Monitoring Program surveys throughout the Mariana Archipelago and at Wake Atoll from March to June 2025. Extensive surveys were taken to look at reef health by the deployment of a variety of instruments for temperature and calcification rates. Plankton and larval fish samples were collected from 60 midwater trawls to gain insight into when and where fish are spawning. Researchers went into the Maug caldera and found that the underwater volcanic vents created a lower pH than the surrounding seawater, creating an ideal environment for studying the effects of ocean acidification on coral reefs. Physical and chemical data with coral condition were collected to understand how the adjacent coral reefs are responding to the acidic conditions at the Maug caldera.

In a collaborative effort with the community in the Mariana Islands, bottomfish surveys were conducted aboard the NOAA Ship *Oscar Elton Sette*, with 600 bottomfish specimens collected. Results will provide vital data on species abundance, distribution and life history traits (age, growth and reproduction) to improve stock assessments for bottomfish species. Collaboration with the fishing community is important to build transparency bonds and improve the science.

In a continued collaborative effort with the Council and fishing industry, NMFS has been developing a tag deployment technology for leatherback turtles. The team recently achieved major milestones, with tags deployed on wild animals lasting an average of more than 40 days, exceeding the threshold critical for evaluating post-interaction impacts. PIFSC hopes to obtain more data soon to fill the critical gap with plans to collaborate with other fisheries on the East Coast and possibly New Zealand to deploy tags in fisheries that have higher interaction rates.

PIFSC has been conducting green turtles research in the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) off Kāneʻohe, Oʻahu, where the turtles have nested over a series of years. Recent satellite tagging and tissue samples of five post-nesting green turtles have shown them staying close to the nesting beach after they lay their eggs. This raises the question of whether these green turtles are a small subpopulation or connected with the Central and Northern Pacific population that nests primarily at French Frigate Shoals. Results can guide the need for local management if there is a genetic distinction.

PIFSC published a paper titled “Accounting for sampling bias reveals a decline in abundance of endangered false killer whales in the main Hawaiian Islands” Aug. 14, 2025. A collaborative team of researchers analyzed photo-ID data from 1999-2022 using a new method that accounts for animal movement and allows for the estimation of trends. PIFSC scientists together with external partners developed a new analytical approach to account for some of the biases in sampling. The estimates are more accurate than previous results as the methods reduced uncertainties related to partial coverage of the study area. The results indicate that the population was at 139 whales in 2022 and has declined 3.5% per year over the last 10 years. If this rate of decline continues, the population will be fewer than 100 individuals within the next 10 years. Cause of decline is uncertain due to the lack of monitoring beyond the ongoing population assessment, but photo identification and published reports indicate fisheries interactions as well as other factors such as low genetic variability and contaminants.

Ilaoa thanked PIFSC staff T.Todd Jones and Marlowe Sabater for helping American Samoa shore up data collection for the small-boat fisheries and for the efforts of getting the biosampling program back on track. DMWR is looking forward to the arrival of *Oscar Elton Sette* in summer 2026, as the staff will participate in the surveys alongside the bottomfish fishers.

Littnan echoed Malloy's statement on budget uncertainties and reassured the Council that PIFSC had full intentions of continuing all the investments and work in the territories. When the *Oscar Elton Sette* arrives in American Samoa, PIFSC will replicate the bottomfish life history survey as well as coral reef monitoring.

Sakoda asked how PIFSC would approach the question of what is driving the decline in insular FKWs if unlimited resources were available.

Littnan referenced the FKW Take Reduction Team recommendations and said more monitoring is needed to identify the problem. One component would be getting reports from various fisheries that are operating and could be interacting with the insular FKWs, as well as following up with anecdotal reports on interactions to generate some measure of interaction levels. An important place to start would be to get an assessment of serious injury mortality and figuring out the operational interactions and survival rates, noting that a lot of the existing information comes from the number of animals that have marks on them. PIFSC researchers are still opportunistically collecting samples to look at contaminants and other factors, but Littnan thinks the potential fisheries side will be the next biggest question.

Sword asked if there is a possible correlation between increasing sharks and the decline in the insular FKW population, noting sharks are a problem in the Pacific.

Littnan said the shark issue is global as many fishermen everywhere are reporting more depredation and interactions with sharks. A localized connection may be possible, but he was not aware of any information that would signal a connection between sharks and insular FKWs.

B. NOAA Office of General Counsel Pacific Islands Section

Onaga provided the GCPI report. A new case filed May 22, 2025, in the Hawai'i federal court, *Kāpa'a, et al., v. Trump, et al.*, challenged President Trump's Proclamation 10918 issued April 17, 2025. The plaintiffs asserted that opening the PIHMNM to commercial fishing within 50 to 200 nautical miles (nm) exceeded the president's authority under the U.S. Constitution and the Antiquities Act. The plaintiffs also asserted that NMFS's April 25, 2025, letter notifying the fishermen of the implication of the proclamation was in violation of the Administrative Procedures Act and the MSA, and that it should have been conducted through formal rulemaking. On June 24, 2025, plaintiffs filed a motion for partial summary judgement on the issue of the NMFS letter and whether it violated the Administrative Procedures Act and MSA. On Aug. 8, 2025, the federal district court judge granted plaintiffs' motion and vacated the letter. The court held that the letter was reviewable as final agency action by creating a safe harbor for commercial fishing operations within the monument expansion area, and that it was improper for NMFS to do so without notice and comment rulemaking. The scheduling conference was vacated Sept. 16, 2025, and the court moved the scheduling of the matter to begin January 2026 with a non-jury trial scheduled for Dec. 7, 2026.

Center for Biological Diversity v. NMFS challenged NMFS's denial of the petition to issue protective regulation for 20 threatened coral species pursuant to ESA Section 4(d). The court granted in part and denied in part plaintiff's motion for summary judgement and NMFS's

cross motion. The court remanded to NMFS to provide fuller explanation as to the issues relating to climate change and the decision relating to protective regulations for the Caribbean corals. Plaintiffs filed a notice of appeals which was dismissed, and the case has effectively ended. NMFS is addressing if the fees are warranted.

Muña asked what the two wins were for NMFS versus the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD).

Onaga said the complaint listed several different factors requesting an explanation from NMFS as to why the agency declined to implement 4(d) regulations. CBD prevailed on the issue of climate change as well as the explanation of reason for the denial, and the Caribbean explanation of why protective measures were not. NMFS prevailed on the claims relating to 4(d) protective regulations for the Pacific corals as well as trade.

Muña asked if that meant NMFS prevailed in declining to list corals in the Pacific.

Onaga said the petition filed to NMFS requested 4(d) regulations for the threatened corals listed in the Pacific. NMFS declined the petition with letters issued explaining the reason. CBD challenged the reasons and the court determined that NMFS provided sufficient explanations for reasons in the Pacific, but not for the Caribbean in providing protective resolutions. The courts also determined that NMFS did not provide sufficient reason for the climate change basis to implement 4(d) regulations. NMFS is in the process of providing fuller explanation to CBD, but without a deadline set by the courts, no further updates are available.

Igisomar asked if the territories are covered under the category of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). He also asked whether there are exemptions to federal laws that the territories would qualify for if they are considered SIDS.

Onaga said interpretation of SIDS is dictated by a convention that the United States joined and whose rules the country must follow. Onaga asked for clarification on the second question.

Sword clarified Igisomar's question and said the convention has no problems with the territories. Sword asked if the United States has any specific law preventing the territories from being SIDS for fisheries purposes.

Tucher said he has written on the SIDS provision in the past and has briefed the Council in a closed session on that issue. The current administration makes policy decisions with respect to the treatment of the participating territories. GCPI advises the chief of delegation and NMFS on legal sufficiency of their proposed approaches. Tucher is happy to have another closed session with the Council to discuss this matter.

C. U.S. Coast Guard

Guanci reported on the USCG Oceania District, formerly known as USCG District 14 operations. Oceania District responded to 202 cases that consisted of search and rescue, law enforcement and marine environmental protection response, ports, waterways and coastal security missions. Within the past year, USCG cutters made three trips to American Samoa to patrol the surrounding EEZs under USCG bilateral agreements and the high seas areas to the north. Guam and the CNMI had 41 days of patrol time in the EEZs with 10 boardings conducted in the high seas areas including the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) EEZ.

USCG cutter *Harriet Lane* completed an 8,400-nm patrol through French Polynesia, the Cook Islands and American Samoa. Twenty-five boardings were logged with two violations of international management measures and partner nation fisheries laws. The patrol also included several shore site engagements in French Polynesia and American Samoa with a flight deck reception event. USCG cutter *Myrtle Hazard* strengthened its strategic regional partnerships through bilateral law enforcement operations with Palau. Operations consisted of bilateral shiprider patrol within the Palau EEZ which resulted in two boardings. USCG cutter *Oliver Henry* is currently patrolling the FSM EEZ.

In July 2025, the USCG supported Operation Nasse 2025, an annual operation led by the United States, France, Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA). It focused on counter-illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing efforts in the western Pacific Ocean, primarily the Southern albacore fishery, and included participants from Vanuatu, Tonga, Fiji and the Solomon Islands, and partners of the Pacific Island nations. Thirty-one high seas boarding inspections were conducted with 13 citations issued for violations of conservation management measures, and 80 additional vessels were identified by air. USCG supported the FFA Operation Island Chief, the third of four annual surge operations led by FFA that coordinate air and sea patrols over a two-week period across the Western Pacific. Participants from nine nations attended in 80 boardings with 13 cited violations and 79 additional verified sightings.

In August 2025 the USCG facilitated for the first time a search and rescue (SAR) training for American Samoa first responder agencies. The training included SAR fundamentals and tabletop exercises. The local USCG Auxiliary Flotilla also hosted a boating safety course, which included boating and paddling safety presentations, and equipment demonstrations.

Upcoming patrols include USCG cutter *Oliver Berry* deployment in the east and south of the United States as well as high seas areas with a stop in American Samoa. The *Harriet Lane* will be deployed to patrol the Western Pacific. USCG has smaller vessels that will be deployed to the U.S. EEZs around the MHI, American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI. USGS will support Operation Kuru Kuru in its fourth and final FFA surge operation.

Rosario expressed concern that the USCG in Guam conducted vessel checks during a one-day fishing derby in June 2025, boarding vessels both offshore and in the marina and causing traffic for many returning from fishing. Many boaters questioned why the USCG chose this specific day.

Guanci said he was not aware the USCG were conducting inspections during the derby. He will bring the question up to the USCG Guam office and provide a response once received.

Igisomar asked whether there were any IUU fishing within the U.S. EEZ around the CNMI identified during the vessel observations.

Guanci said no IUU fishing was noted during the vessel observations and welcomed any available information.

Igisomar asked about observation mechanisms for monitoring the EEZ besides the cutters deployed, and whether other methods such as satellites were used.

Guanci said vessel monitoring systems (VMSs) were utilized and accessible to the United States and international feeds. Other unclassified systems were used to monitor automatic identification system traffic.

Sword said the Marine Patrol and SARs team, and American Samoa's Department of Public Safety receive grants from the USCG which falls under USCG auspices for the recreational fishing boats. The current recreational boat rules for the USCG need to correlate with the local rules, and something needs to be done. The only statutes in American Samoa are the ones for commercial boats which are approximately 40 to 50 years old, which force the recreational fishing boats to comply with the commercial rules. This is unfair because it is difficult and expensive to obtain flares in American Samoa for recreational boats. The Oceania Pacific office needs to push the Marine Patrol units to work on the statutes to create fair laws for recreational boats so the auxiliary team can inspect the boats properly in accordance with the USCG regulations.

Guanci said he will take this concern to the USCG Oceania Pacific office.

Ilaoa asked whether any thought had been put into a USCG officer with direct ties to American Samoa to serve longer than one-year rotation in the territory.

Guanci said he cannot speak to the hiring process, but stated his awareness of a current search for an individual who speaks the language and resides in the territory, for a civilian job.

Ilaoa said will be much needed, especially with the retirement of Frank Thompson.

Feliciano said one of the difficulties in American Samoa is having a U.S. passport holder become a master. A request was made to the USCG team that visited American Samoa to look into a possible Jones Act exemption, as the current exemption does not apply to fishing vessels. He asked if the USCG can investigate the feasibility or viability, and acknowledged that American Samoa understands the issue to be a congressional amendment.

Guanci said the USCG can look into this issue, but there will be hurdles because it is not a USCG regulation.

Sword expressed his appreciation to the USCG Oceania District for its efforts to help the local longliners in meeting all their safety requirements.

Igisomar asked whether there are means of monitoring the island's jurisdictions beyond the regular scheduled patrols. CNMI DLNR works closely with the Northern Islands mayors, who have commented about fishing vessels coming to the islands. He asked if there is any equipment for capturing long distance photos and videos that CNMI can work with USCG to supply residents in the Northern Islands, and what the readiness posture would be in deploying officers to investigate.

Guanci said he cannot comment on the readiness posture, but noted it would most likely be on a case-by-case basis. In response to the equipment inquiry, forms can be filled out to include location, description of the vessels, photos and all these can be sent to the USCG Guam office for further investigation.

Igisomar asked if foreign vessels could be prosecuted after leaving the EEZ, if the vessel can be identified with the vessel descriptions, location and photos.

Guanci said it depends on what the vessel is doing. If fishing is conducted, the vessel can be prosecuted. He said he would have to talk to NOAA colleagues as to the process that occurs after the vessel leaves the EEZ.

Perez echoed Rosario's comment and asked if the USCG auxiliary in Guam can conduct a pre-inspection for events to prevent being boarded out at sea.

Guanci said he will bring this question up to the USCG Guam office.

D. Enforcement

1. NOAA Office of Law Enforcement

Martina Sagapolu provided an overview of the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement's (OLE) activities from June 1 to Aug. 31, 2025. OLE responded to 82 incident cases this quarter, of which 16 involved protected species, and 66 were related to fisheries. Of the 82 cases, 28 were from Hawai'i, 53 from American Samoa, one from Guam and none from the CNMI. The increase in fisheries incidents is related to Port State Measures Agreement incidents involving foreign vessels or domestic fleets that have minor infractions. The decline in protected resources incidents during this quarter compared to previous years is due to the significant decrease in manpower, underscoring the importance of OLE's relationship with the territories and the state and their joint enforcement officers. Only one officer is deployed in Guam, one officer deployed in American Samoa and one officer covering all the islands of Hawai'i.

OLE conducted 39 patrols during this period, 30 of which occurred in Hawai'i, six in American Samoa, three in Guam and none in the CNMI. The patrols were both land-and sea-based. During patrols, joint enforcement officers were deployed to give an extension of eyes for OLE. A question arose about whether it is a violation for the foreign vessels to be transiting, and Sagapolu said it depends on each fishing vessel's activities. OLE has active investigations involving vessels that operate in WCPFC areas that have transitioned into U.S. waters with questionable activities. OLE issued several summary settlements to individuals for the illegal approach of spinner dolphins, as well as to one individual for operating a fishing vessel without notifying the agency of fishing activity that required observer coverage.

OLE continues to conduct 90% of Port State Measures Agreement boardings in American Samoa. These boardings aim to determine if the vessel was operating lawfully in the convention areas and if it is conducting any transshipments. The boardings have uncovered that vessels that avoid pulling into American Samoa — because they know they will be inspected — attempt to circumvent the system by rendezvousing with another vessel either inside or outside the EEZ. Trade enforcement and partnerships are key to addressing IUU fishing in the region. Similar issues are encountered in the CNMI, with smaller vessels coming in from the neighboring islands of FSM or Marshall Islands, or large vessels rendezvousing with smaller vessels that bring fish into port. OLE is negotiating with another partner in the CNMI to address imports coming into CNMI as a gateway into the rest of the United States.

OLE staff, USCG and a NOAA Ernest F. Hollings intern attended a ceremony aboard the *Harriet Lane* in Pago Pago with key territorial and federal partners. A joint sea patrol was carried out with DMWR along the southern coast of Tutuila, from Pago Pago Harbor to Fagalele Bay, to make up for the lack of patrols in the National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa due to limited resources. OLE also conducted a seafood inspection training, which provided an opportunity to work hand in hand with Guam customs and DOAG. OLE has discovered in the

territories that even though a product is entered under the customs database, there is no way of tracking the fish that is coming in through the containers. Through this training, OLE is asking partners to review imports and focus on the 13 species NMFS identified. OLE has identified areas in the territories where these products are coming in, and is working to close the loophole in coordination with the Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP).

Ilaoa acknowledged and thanked OLE for helping American Samoa obtain its new Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA) for 2025-2029. This will provide important funding and resources for DMWR and its conservation officers to help combat illegal fishing.

Igisomar echoed Ilaoa's acknowledgement of the JEA program and complimented the OLE officers with assistance in getting the paperwork in order.

Weaver asked how a fisherman may go about reporting an incident and whether there is a checklist for the process.

Sagapolu said OLE is working on an app for this purpose, which will allow members of the public free access to submit photos, location and names of the fishing vessels. In the meantime, fishermen can contact the local OLE, the hotline phone number or online. Sagapolu encouraged fishermen to report, recalling a case from 1995 of a foreign fishing vessel that sat on the banks in American Samoa. A local fisherman who was returning to shore saw this vessel and the foreign vessel attempted to chase down the local vessel. The local fisherman returned to shore around 6 p.m. and called an OLE officer to report that the foreign vessel was actively pulling up bottomfish off the bank. The report resulted in a maximum penalty under the MSA, and seizure of the catch. There are other apps such as FishWatch, and OLE has ways to determine whether a vessel broke down, but no one should ever be deterred from reporting these types of sighting so OLE can investigate.

Muña said she looks forward to meeting the new OLE officer when she arrives in Guam. Guam has been enforcing priorities for the administration that includes the inspections of the ports and the entry for containers of food. Conservation officers have also worked with the USCG in Guam, submitting photos of patrols conducted in territorial waters to ensure required safety equipment was on board. The partnerships are making these types of patrols possible. Muña acknowledged Guam collaborating in the Trusted Rider Program with its conservation officers with the help of the USCG and OLE priorities.

Itibus asked whether the CNMI having no reported incidents is due to lack of staff.

Sagapolu said under the JEA, the reporting requirement covers activities that fall under identified execution priorities, and these reports are submitted to OLE. A new supervisor was assigned to the CNMI but is still in training. There is work being done, and the officer will occasionally fly over and will be addressing the reporting requirements with the DFW.

Ilaoa asked if non-U.S. flagged vessels are allowed to stop within the EEZ or are required to transit straight through.

Sagapolu said those are the types of anomalies that OLE examines. Sagapolu made a recommendation to the previous DMWR director regarding vessels that come in and are unable to go into port due to time. DMWR should have a designated area within the three-mile zone identified with coordinates so that those vessels have a legitimate place to wait in those cases, which affords the local territories, Marine Patrol and Department of Public Safety the

opportunity to monitor these vessels. Without a designated area, vessels hang out and are more likely to conduct illegal recreational fishing activity. Sagapolu hopes Ilaoa, as American Samoa's newly appointed director, takes this into consideration.

2. NOAA Office of General Counsel Enforcement Section

Melissa Goldman, NOAA Office of General Counsel Enforcement Section (GCES), provided a brief report on enforcement cases and activities in the Pacific Islands Region. As the new enforcement attorney for NOAA, Goldman focused on working with PIRO International Fisheries Division, OLE and USCG partners to organize and assess outstanding compliance cases referred to the WCPFC. This includes cases reported by the United States regarding foreign-flag vessels and cases referred by other WCPFC members regarding alleged violations by those vessels. This collaboration has allowed the disposal of over 200 outstanding allegations against U.S. vessels for lack of evidence and other issues.

In response to inquiries regarding transiting through the EEZ by foreign-flagged vessels, Goldman said regulations exist for certain situations that would allow for prosecution (e.g., failure to stow fishing gear while within the EEZ without a permit). Such cases can be lengthy to prosecute because there is a process for notifying the flag state under the conservation and management measure (CMM) to address the issue on its end — whether the vessels are inside the WCPFC area or another convention area — before GCES determines what to do if the results are unsatisfactory. One reported case GCES is working on may result in a Notice of Violation Assessment being issued later in 2025 if the flag CMM does not appropriately handle the situation.

GCES publishes its charging decisions, settlements and cases that go to hearing on its website. One reported case involved a violation of the MMPA regulation in waters around Hawai'i with a fine of \$34,500 issued. The case is set for a hearing but with no date scheduled at this time.

Goldman and her colleagues have begun a long-term project to conduct a comprehensive review of outcomes based on summary settlement schedules, prosecutions across the country to address issues like consistency in application and interpretation and to ensure that penalty amounts are being appropriately applied. This may result in a revision of the summary settlement schedules, which will be put out for public comment, and will be reported on at a future Council meeting for input.

E. U.S. State Department

Ryan provided the U.S. State Department report. She is the new representative for the agency, taking over for Colin Brinkman. Ryan has also assumed the role of lead on the South Pacific Tuna Treaty after David Hogan, who served as the prior Council representative, took early retirement.

Following a lengthy delay, the United States has provided the year one payment of foreign assistance under the 2023 Economic Assistance Agreement associated with the South Pacific Tuna Treaty. On Aug. 11, 2025, in a meeting with the Pacific Island ambassadors, the deputy secretary of state announced that the United States has made the payment to the FFA showing the commitment to the Tuna Treaty and to the region, as well as the administration's commitment to U.S. vessels and American Samoa. The delay was due to a hold on the foreign assistance budget in 2024, and a pause by the new administration to ensure all foreign assistance

aligned with its priorities. The U.S. State Department is expected to move forward with the 2025 payment after it became overdue because of budget uncertainty, which was recently settled with the Office of Management and Budget. The deputy secretary of state is currently in the Pacific Islands and has heard loudly from friends in the Pacific Islands that they are interested in having the payment made as soon as possible.

Ryan alluded to the written report including an update on the IATTC meeting, which will be covered later in the meeting.

F. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Macduff provided the USFWS report. The agency has issued a special use permit to the University of Hawai'i for research in the PIHNM from June to August 2025. Research was conducted in Howland Island, Baker Island, Jarvis Island, Palmyra and Kingman Reef Monument Units to catch and release bigeye, skipjack and yellowfin tuna with conventional tags around industry-provided existing fish aggregating devices (FADs) in the area using U.S.-flagged F/V *Gutsy Lady 4*. Another permit was issued to the Ocean Exploration Trust to conduct research in the PIHNM from August to September 2025, to explore the deep seas and seamounts in Howland and Baker Islands in the monument unit.

USFWS has issued a special permit to Guam GU Holdings to install a fiber optic cable within the Mariana Trench National Wildlife Refuge. The Ocean Exploration Trust E/V *Nautilus* conducted research in the islands from May to June 2025, exploring hydrothermal vent communities and deep seamounts within the monument. Commercial scattering of cremated ashes was proposed as a use in the monument, and found to be appropriate and compatible with refuge goals. A special permit is in development and will likely be issued soon.

The Japanese government is planning to conduct research in the monument later this year, and will explore seamounts, mud volcanoes and deep areas in the Mariana Archipelago in late December 2025 and early January 2026.

Under the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, DMWR expressed interest in purchasing a drone to assist with FAD maintenance and monitoring. The program plans to work with partners to include this as a proposed action in their consultation, with updates to be provided as more information becomes available.

In the Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office, 22 long-term coral reef ecosystem monitoring transects were installed at Wake Island's seaward reef and lagoon sites in June 2025, with baseline benthic invertebrate and fish monitoring data collected.

Ilaoa commented on the process that DMWR must go through to obtain permission to conduct a survey at a monument in American Samoa waters. Approval is made by an individual who lives off-island. Ilaoa said someone who lives on the island should be allowed to approve these special permits to prevent lengthy wait time for approval. Currently, those seeking permits are required to pay \$22,000, which is out of the budget. Ilaoa hopes that the service will allow someone from local staff to serve in the role. Ilaoa asked if that is something that American Samoa DMWR can have moving forward.

MacDuff said he will bring up the question to his chain of command, and acknowledged that the departure of Brian Peck from USFWS makes the permit process more challenging.

G. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

H. Council Discussion and Action

Regarding potential obstacles to U.S. Participating Territories enjoying privileges as a SIDS or Participating Territory within the WCPFC, the Council:

- 1. Requested GCPI and NMFS to provide an updated briefing to the Council on potential legal challenges for U.S. Pacific Island Territories from utilizing privileges afforded to SIDS/Participating Territories within the WCPFC Convention Area.**

Muña asked that the document regarding SIDS that GCPI mentioned earlier be shared with the Council in advance of the meeting.

Moved by Ilaoa, seconded by Perez.

Motion passed with Malloy abstaining.

Regarding the USCG, the Council:

- 2. Requested USCG to continue to work with American Samoa to address its difficulties with procuring U.S. masters for the American Samoa longline fishery, including the issues identified with the Jones Act.**

Moved by Feliciano, seconded by Ilaoa.

Motion passed.

Regarding USFWS report, the Council:

- 3. Requested the USFWS Pacific Islands work with American Samoa to assist with issues in providing permits for work in the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument (RAMNM).**

Moved by Ilaoa, seconded by Feliciano.

Motion passed.

VII. Hawai‘i Archipelago and Pacific Remote Island Areas

A. Moku Pepa

Ramsey reported summer is when there is a large recruitment of bait fish that provide food for larger predators. Summer is also when the seasons for lobsters, *moi* (Pacific threadfin) and Kona crab open. People catch lobsters and Kona crab with a net, pole and line, and hand-harvest. During the reporting period, there were two tournaments held that provided benefits to the community beyond the catch. On Maui, the 37th Annual Larry Libres Fishing and Diving Tournament was held with 198 *he‘e* (octopus) divers and 195 *‘oama* (juvenile goatfish) fishers. Also, the Kaka‘ako Kasting Club held a tournament that provided benefits to the Boys and Girls Club of Hawai‘i and raised several thousand dollars that included free fishing poles for kids and educational tents at the event. The tournaments have conservation measures that support families and ensure participants have a good time. The Hawai‘i marlin tournament season is another example of how fishing can contribute beyond the catch, and in this case to the economy of Kona. Out of the five tournaments held, three of them were won by charter boats that caught and released marlins with prize purses up to \$390,000. Notable catches included a grander marlin

caught by TANTRUM Sportfishing in Kona where the gonads were donated to science, a 126.5-pound 'ahi (tuna) caught from shore in Hilo and a 115.6-pound ulua caught from shore in Hilo. Kayak fishing has also increased in Hawai'i and two fishers qualified to represent the United States in the World Championship Sea Kayak Fishing Tournament in Piombino, Italy.

Sword said kayak fishing has been growing in American Samoa and asked how many teams Hawai'i sent to the fishing tournament.

Ramsey clarified that a Hawai'i team competed in the national championship in Florida, where individual scores determined qualification for the U.S. team. Of the 10 members selected for the world championship, two are from Hawai'i.

Dang reported the Hawai'i longline fleet has stayed away from the Pacific Remote Island Areas following the recent court decision demonstrating that the fleet follows the rules and respects the process. The Hawaii Longline Association participated in the Hawai'i Pacific University marine debris program, hauling in more than 60,000 pounds of derelict nets that would otherwise end up on Hawai'i's reefs and beaches. Unfortunately, the program did not get funded this year and will be shutting down. The fleet would like to see alternative funding come through to continue the program. Regarding markets, tariffs on imported seafood have created a bump in demand for Hawai'i-landed fish that benefits the fleet. At the same time, tariffs have also increased costs for bait and gear. The fleet is assessing the impacts before moving forward. September to November is a slow time for fish prices with fewer tourists. The fleet is hoping for a stronger winter season, but there was a note that folks are keeping an eye out on forecasts of a possible La Niña that might stretch through most of this winter into early 2026. Regarding tourism, arrivals are 10-12% lower than pre-pandemic levels, with Japanese arrivals are about half of what they were prior to 2020. There is hope that Japanese visitors will return soon, as they are key consumers of Hawai'i's fresh fish.

B. Division of Aquatic Resources Report

Bryan Ishida, Hawai'i DLNR Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR), presented the agency report for May to July 2025. From September 2024 to July 2025, the deep-seven fishery reported 147,533 pounds in mixed species catch, or approximately 30% of the allocated ACL. For the 2025 uku (green jobfish) season, 34,066 pounds were landed, despite the stock being assessed as healthy. Compared to the past five years, the 2025 season is performing well in the short term; however, over a longer timescale, overall performance remains low. The Kona crab fishery was closed during the reporting period and will reopen October 1. Prior to the closure on May 1, approximately 17% of the allocated ACL had been caught.

In 2025, 1,533 commercial marine licenses (CMLs) were issued, generating a revenue of \$192,500. In addition to single-person CMLs, 89 commercial marine vessel licenses were issued, generating a revenue of \$84,000. Roughly one-third of the CML revenue is still from the longline fleet. Regarding the commercial marine dealer license, rules were adopted in May 2024 and notice letters were sent to all known commercial marine dealers and the requirement will be enforced beginning Oct. 1, 2025. This is a \$100 license per year with annual renewal that replaces the existing free commercial marine dealer registration requirement. The new nonresident recreational marine fishing license has outperformed what was projected and generated revenue of \$647,067, with approximately two-thirds of the licensees noting that they will be going on a charter fishing excursion while they are in Hawai'i. Hawai'i Island and Maui led in total purchases. The ocean stewardship user fee (Aloha I Ke Kai) applies to anyone participating in commercial ocean excursions or activities in Hawai'i. This fee requires a \$1

payment from each patron or participant in a commercially operated ocean activity. From Jan. 1, 2024, to July 31, 2025, approximately 1.6 million participants have paid the fee. Charter fishing accounts for about 3% of total activity, which includes snorkel and ocean cruises.

Zero permits for the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Sanctuary were issued. One permit was resubmitted to the Board of Land and Natural Resources due to technical issues with the submittal. Permits in review include one special ocean use permit related to film production, one conservation and management permit for the Sanctuary and Monument Management Board, and two research permits related to seabirds. In June, one FAD was found to be missing and one FAD was recovered. In July, one FAD was reported missing and one FAD was off station. The Aquatic Invasive Species Management Program continues to monitor invasive species in Pearl Harbor and Kāneʻohe Bay. During the reporting period, DAR led surveys in the Pearl Harbor mouth which has an estimated infestation within the harbor of approximately 90 acres. The focus on the Pearl Harbor mouth will be led by a new hire, given that it would be the main vector for spreading to state waters outside of the area. The DAR Aquatic Invasive Species team plans to begin removing invasive anemones on the Kāneʻohe Bay patch reef in fall 2025.

C. Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission

Sakoda reported the State of Hawaiʻi participated in the 78th Annual PSMFC meeting in Boise, Idaho. The commission is an interstate agency that conserves, develops and manages Pacific Ocean fishery resources with six member states: Alaska, California, Hawaiʻi, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. PSMFC works collaboratively with the fishing industry, fishery managers, commercial and recreational fishermen and seafood processors. There were three commissioners from Hawaiʻi with Brian Neilson, representing DLNR, Gil Kualiʻi and Phil Fernandez. They received updates on congressional funding and regional federal agency activities. Hawaiʻi introduced a new resolution regarding funding for FKW recovery that states “Through October 31, 2029, the commission encourages NMFS to continue to provide sufficient funding to implement the Hawaiʻi FKW recovery plan. The commission also encourages NMFS to secure federal resources for PIFSC to continue the recovery implementation strategy. Additional research is needed to understand the cause of the population decline and impacts of fisheries interactions.” Hawaiʻi also introduced an amendment to an existing resolution on EM, supporting the continued implementation of EM and reporting programs for Alaska, Hawaiʻi and West Coast fisheries.

Ilaoa said PSMFC made recommendations for NMFS to identify funding for the region’s priorities and asked Malloy what the agency has done to leverage funding for regional priorities like EM with the commission.

Malloy said PIRO has worked with PSMFC, which has extensive experience with EM of fisheries in Alaska and on the West Coast. It has infrastructure that PIRO can leverage for EM in the Pacific Islands longline fleets. PSMFC has provided grants to PIRO and PIFSC supporting camera installation, data management, video review and other key components of EM programs.

D. Small-Boat Fisheries Issues (shortline, sharks)

Mark Fitchett, Council staff, reported on the Aug. 23, 2025, meeting in Kona, Hawaiʻi, held to address gear conflicts between pelagic handline and shortline fishers. The concern was initially raised at a March 2025 community meeting, where participants requested more information on federal management of these fisheries and asked for continued dialogue. In response, Council staff coordinated with the State of Hawaiʻi, PIRO and PIFSC to meet with the

fishing community and discuss potential solutions. At the meeting, staff provided an overview of previous Council efforts to federally manage the shortline fishery and the management landscape and rulemaking processes through Chapter 91 for state rules, Council process through the MSA, and the option of fishers developing a gentlemen's agreement without formal management action.

During the meeting, fishers said shortline boats are using longline gear where a fisher was caught setting gear that was longer than one mile. Others discussed the way that the shortline sets are laid out and although the sets are legal, deploying more than one set could be seen as a longline instead. The community came up with potential solutions to change policy at the state level that included redefining shortline, establishing a set limit or requiring gear identification similar to lay net with a tracking number. There are plans to expand the scoping process beyond Kona to engage shortline fishers on the neighboring islands.

Rosario asked if vessels could deploy both longline and shortline gear within the same trip.

Fitchett said the vessel would need to have a longline limited-entry permit, but deploying both gear types may be problematic with the presence of longline gear on the vessel.

Simonds said longline boats are prohibited from fishing from shore to 50 and 75 miles around the MHI.

Malloy said the Council had previous actions and asked what has changed for the Council to reconsider federal management of this fishery.

Fitchett said the gear conflict alone was part of the reason to reconsider federal management of the fishery with more fishers deploying shortline gear in state and federal waters.

Simonds said the Council has dealt with this issue every few years and has led to letting the fishing community work things out instead of having a regulation. People should continue to have conversations and discuss how things can improve.

E. Advisory Group Report and Recommendations

1. Advisory Panel

Kuali'i, Hawai'i Advisory Panel (AP) vice chair, presented the meeting report and recommendations. He said Roy Morioka told him that multi-agency participation in a management effort offers a wide range of benefits from increasing innovation and efficiency to improving outcomes for the public. By sharing resources, expertise and perspectives, collaborating agencies can solve complex problems that no single organization could address alone.

Regarding shortline fishing, the Hawai'i AP:

- Recommends no federal management of the shortline fishery at this time.
- Recommends the Council continue to work with NMFS, the State of Hawai'i and the affected fishing community to resolve gear conflicts between shortline and small-boat fishers.

2. Fishing Industry Advisory Committee

Michael Goto, Fishing Industry Advisory Committee (FIAC) chair, presented the meeting report and recommendations.

Regarding Hawai‘i nonlongline fisheries, the FIAC:

- Recommends the Council encourage continuance of stakeholder engagement meetings on other Hawaiian Islands to explore management options for the Hawai‘i shortline fishery.
- Recommends the Council request the State of Hawai‘i to provide alternative and reliable offloading points for commercial vessels in Honokohau Harbor in Kona.

3. Scientific and Statistical Committee

There were no SSC recommendations for Hawai‘i.

F. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

G. Council Discussion and Action

Regarding shortline fishing, the Council:

- 1. Directed staff to continue to work with NMFS, the State of Hawai‘i and the affected fishing community on stakeholder engagement meetings on other Hawaiian Islands to address the gear conflict issue between the Hawai‘i shortline and small-boat fishers and explore management options and report back to the Council at its next meeting.**

Moved by Igisomar, seconded by Rosario.

Motion passed.

Regarding Hawai‘i nonlongline fisheries, the Council:

- 2. Requested the State of Hawai‘i explore alternative and reliable offloading points for commercial vessels in Honokohau Harbor in Kona.**

Sakoda said DAR met with fishers in August and the boating administrator heard the concerns from the fishing community and made a commitment to dedicate a space for fishers to offload.

Moved by Itibus, seconded by Rosario.

Motion passed.

VIII. Program Planning and Research

A. Legislative Report

Joshua DeMello, Council staff, provided the legislative update on congressional actions since the last meeting in June. Congress continued to concentrate on protected species and held a subcommittee hearing on the Endangered Species Transparency and Reasonableness as well as another hearing on MMPA reform. The Standards for Understanding Source and Habitat

Identification (SUSHI) Act in Congress also had a subcommittee hearing, which would require NOAA to develop a method for identifying country of origin for red snapper and tunas. Other bills staff is tracking include the Fish Modernization Act and the Illegal Red Snapper and Tuna Enforcement Act, the Supporting the Health of Aquatic Systems through Research, Knowledge and Enhanced Dialogue (SHARKED) Act of 2025, the Marine Aquaculture Research for America Act and the Young Fishermen's Development Act. While there is an MSA reauthorization bill out there, it is similar to last session's bill and is not moving at this time. The legislative report is also provided in the quarterly council newsletter and on the Council website.

B. Aligning Science and Management Priorities

Mark Mitsuyasu, Council staff, presented a memo dated Aug. 29, 2025, from the Council executive directors to Kelly Denit, NMFS Office of Sustainable Fisheries, following up on an initiative to align NOAA and Council priorities for science and management. The councils are working regionally and awaiting NMFS criteria and guidance. The Council met with PIFSC and PIRO previously and reviewed priorities but are awaiting that criteria from NMFS headquarters.

Ilaoa said this is something that could give the local governments and communities more of a say in management decisions and avoid some of the one-size-fits-all management style that has plagued the region for some time.

Sword said in the example of the coral critical habitat, the U.S. Pacific territories accounted for 1% of the comments on rules and regulations while the rest of the 99% came from people in other parts of the country. It does not make sense because they do not know anything about coral reefs but it does harm the ability for islanders to live on the islands. These types of priorities need to look holistically at things, especially at the people that live in these areas.

C. Report on the Seafood Executive Order Updated Recommendations

Asuka Ishizaki reported on EO 14276, noting that Section 4(a)(i) requires the secretary of commerce to gather RFMC input and provide updates on the councils' recommendations submitted under EO 13921. These recommendations were intended to reduce burdens on domestic fishing and to increase production. The councils were directed to cast a wide net by the previous NMFS assistant administrator to look across not just MSA actions, but across all the different statutes that affect fisheries. Previous recommendations from the earlier EO, as well as a review of the administration's "10-for-1" attempt at deregulations, identified other priorities.

Fisheries in the region provide important national and local benefits, contributing to the U.S. seafood supply and supporting high-value activities such as the cannery in American Samoa and the region's small-boat fisheries. The response to the EO looked at federally imposed burdens that come from other applicable laws such as the Antiquities Act, data limitations that make it challenging to effectively manage under the ACL framework, and other drivers of burdens in regional federal fishery management. The first priority is an action to remove fishing prohibitions in the marine national monuments and providing for fishing regulations to be managed under the MSA. The second set of priorities is MSA actions tied to the ESA biological opinion reasonable and prudent measures. These are potential candidate actions that could be reviewed and updated or removed to help reduce burden on the fisheries. The others are lower priority that includes actions such as providing additional flexibility in ACL requirements, a review of the Guam large vessel bottomfish prohibited area, and a number of MSA-related policies that could be changed to remove burdens and to help better manage the resources in the region. Recommendations also include those things that the Council cannot take action on but

could change through other applicable laws such as removing the Southern Exclusion Zone (SEZ) from the FKW Take Reduction Plan, removing the weak hook requirement, revising guidelines under the MMPA and revising ESA listing where populations are increasing. Statutory changes such as amending the Billfish Conservation Act of 2018 would allow the fisheries to sell fish to the mainland and updating ESA citizen suit provisions would reduce litigation risk.

Muña asked if there was also a recommendation to make changes to ESA on the process for nominating a species that would require consultation with the jurisdictions in which that species is found. Before the agency receives a petition, the petitioner would need to consult with the jurisdiction or state agencies for the petition to be accepted by NOAA.

Ishizaki said there was a regulatory change that was made to that effect where petitioners are required to consult or send copies of the petition to the states and territories prior to submitting it.

Sword said all these priorities are to move fisheries in the right direction for the nation but an important challenge is finding enough fishermen for the boats. The result will be having to depend on getting fishermen from outside or be dependent on China to provide people in the United States with sustenance. These changes are needed for fisheries in the region to be self-sustaining. It is important for American Samoa, particularly the cannery, for those changes to be made. The Council is in a unique position to make sure that the country has the seafood it needs and these changes will make it happen.

Ilaoa said the economy of American Samoa is dependent on the fisheries and the governors of American Samoa and the CNMI have made specific requests to provide more value on the traditional and ecological knowledge of the people living in the islands. American Samoa has managed fisheries for thousands of years and can continue to do so if allowed to reduce its dependence on how much foreign fish is brought into the United States.

Ramsey asked how the actions were prioritized.

Ishizaki said the issues were not necessarily listed in priority order but have a relative priority within each category. Staff ranked the items in the category based on which issues have the greatest impact on the fisheries and are most important to complete.

Ramsey asked if staff looked into subsidies or tariff breaks to buffer or lower the costs and reduce burden to fishers.

Ishizaki said staff focused on burdens that were directly related to regulations or actions and did not necessarily look at reducing costs. The Council has been involved in trade-related discussions and has made several recommendations related to reducing burdens on the trade side.

Igisomar said there is a great deal of frustration from the territories from these types of policies. The territories' voices are drowned out by larger entities that have special interests. CNMI continues to be affected by what officials call the "three Cs" — confiscation via conservation without consultation.

Rosario said Guam is facing issues with the military buildup that is constraining fishing such as the live fire exercises around the island. He asked if there is something available to address these issues and allow their fishermen to fish within their waters.

Simonds said the Council has a Mariana Islands Military Working Group as well as the Military Standing Committee to discuss issues and negotiate with the military. There has been some success in the past but there is a need to meet and negotiate these types of things.

Perez said 90% of the seafood in Guam is imported while people are getting arrested for fishing in prohibited areas trying to feed their family. Fishing is in the culture, and it is not a sin to feed the family. The fish are out there but the people cannot catch them. The economy is in bad shape, Guam has not recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic, and people are struggling. The federal government should assist Guam with keeping the community healthy to have a healthy military installation there.

DeMello presented on Section 4(h) of EO 14972 that says that within 180 days of the date of the order, April 17, 2025, the secretary of commerce shall review all existing marine national monuments and provide recommendations to the president of any that should be open to commercial fishing. As part of that review, the Council directed staff to provide its comments to the secretary of commerce. Council staff reviewed the historical commercial fisheries that took place in each of the areas of the marine national monuments, looking at the economic value, the sociocultural value and impacts on the market and community. Staff also reviewed the monument resources and impacts to the resources if commercial fishing were to continue. Going a step further, staff identified initial options for allowing commercial fishing. DeMello provided an overview of the existing controls and regulations on the fisheries in each of the monuments including Rose Atoll, Marianas Trench and Papahānaumokuākea. Getting rid of commercial fishing did not get rid of management and commercial fishing can coexist with the existing monuments. The review was sent to the secretary of commerce July 24, 2025, and a decision is expected by the deadline of October 14.

Ilaoa said the governor of American Samoa has asked that commercial fishing be allowed within the existing RAMNM and that its traditional name, *Muliava*, be used. The longline industry is struggling and opening commercial fishing would provide the fleet more space to chase fish rather than transit hundreds of miles around and hope to find fish on the other side.

Sword said there are no corals after three miles off of *Muliava*, and the option under Council review to open fishing beyond 12 nm factors in this protection. There is no harm in having the longliners fish there to help keep the canneries and the fishing fleet alive. Allowing fishing balances environmental protection with the urgent need to sustain local fisheries.

Rosario said Guam fishermen have been working with the military to relocate firing ranges away from the southern banks but there are layers of restrictions. There is a need to work with the administration to modify these restrictions to allow fishermen to fish again.

Ramsey asked how the deadline for the secretary of commerce to provide a review to the president is affected by a potential government shutdown and what other sources of input the secretary is receiving to make this recommendation to the president.

Malloy said the review is being done by the secretary of commerce in conjunction with the Department of the Interior and includes NOAA and its offices such as NMFS and NOS. The recommendations from these groups have already been submitted to NOAA so if there is a government shutdown, the process would be well underway. She said the analysis NMFS provided identified all the science about the potential impacts of fishing, community perspectives, overlays of other regulatory regimes such as sanctuaries and refuges. The EO also requires the DOC to issue a *Federal Register* notice asking the public for input on any

deregulatory actions that could enhance fishery economic opportunities. She said the president may also consider that input from the broader public.

Igisomar said the CNMI has been experiencing “buyer’s remorse” after all these years since the establishment of the Mariana Trench monument. The community opposed the monument but were overwhelmed by outside special interests. They were promised things like new colleges or a visitor center but have not seen any of that in the 15 years since. All the promises of helping the economy, the people, tourism and the CNMI still has nothing. He said these policies are never ending and create issues just to fish in their own area.

Ilaoa said most of the marine national monuments are in the Pacific and asked why the Pacific Island people must carry the burden for the United States’ marine conservation efforts. The EO is not going to reduce the disparity in the number of monuments in the Pacific but it gives the people the opportunity to reclaim some of the ocean for use how they see fit for their islands without it being mandated by the federal government. This is a great opportunity for Pacific Islanders to reclaim the ocean. If these closures happened around the prime fisheries in the continental United States where lobster fishermen or pollock fishermen were told there would be no more fishing, there would be outrage. Yet, Pacific Islanders are expected to accept it. All this makes the people in the territories feel like second-class citizens, so it is important to take advantage of what opportunity presented by the EO.

Muña asked what the distribution of federal funding is between the monuments and sanctuaries in the Pacific versus the Atlantic. There is a great disparity in the distribution of that funding even though the larger burden and proportion of those designations lie within the Pacific.

Macduff said based on what he has seen, the Northeast Canyons Marine National Monument in the Atlantic gets around half of the funding, even though the area only covers around 5,000 square miles. That could be credited to the Atlantic monument being closer to Washington D.C. and having voting representatives in Congress.

Muña said that illustrates the perspective that it is an unfair process from the creation to the size disparity and the burden that is placed upon the Pacific people while funding to manage these areas are not provided to the places.

D. Recommendations for Commercial Fishing in the Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument Expansion Area (Initial Action)

DeMello presented recommendations for restoring commercial fishing in the PIHMNM expansion area. This area includes waters from 50-200 nm around Jarvis and Wake Islands and Johnston Atoll. Proclamation 8336 issued in 2009 designated the areas from 0-50 nm as a marine national monument and it was expanded to 200 nm around Jarvis, Wake and Johnston through Proclamation 9173 in 2014. At that time, the Council made recommendations to close commercial fishing and permit noncommercial fishing as required by the proclamations. However, on April 17, 2025, the president issued Proclamation 10918 that directed the secretary of commerce to expeditiously publish new proposed rules in the *Federal Register* to amend or repeal all burdensome regulations that restrict commercial fishing in the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument. PIRO sent letters to vessel owners notifying them of the proclamation and a subsequent lawsuit vacated those letters. The purpose of the presentation is to develop recommendations that meet the mandate of the current proclamation to amend or repeal

commercial fishing restrictions. The Council process is a public process that allows for the restrictions to be removed under a legal process under the MSA.

The areas under consideration are 50-200 nm from shore and are very deep (more than 3,800 m). The Council developed fishing regulations under the MSA for these areas before the commercial fishing prohibition, and those regulations remain in effect in the open areas of the Pacific Remote Island Areas. These comprehensive fishing regulations include: no-take marine protected areas (MPAs), federal permitting and reporting requirements, protected species mitigation, prohibitions on the use of bottom-set gillnets, bottom trawls, poisons and explosives, minimum sizes and catch limits/quotas. Although permits have existed for all fisheries, including bottomfish, pelagic troll and handline fisheries, no permits are currently issued for fishing in the area. There are also other agencies that manage this area including the USFWS with the national wildlife refuges.

Proclamation 10918 says that "appropriately managed commercial fishing would not put objects of scientific and historic interest within the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument at risk." The proclamation specifically calls out seamounts, deepwater corals, tropical coral reefs, protected species like turtles, seabirds, manta rays as scientific interests and also providing a natural lab for baseline comparisons for climate change, coral bleaching and ocean acidification. The fisheries are currently dormant and the number of fishermen in that area has been low. This does not provide enough information to determine optimum yield or maximum sustainable yield (MSY) for the fisheries, but highly migratory species that are assessed on a larger scale are not overfished nor experiencing overfishing. The catch of those species from 2014 to 2022 in these areas was as low as 0.2% of the MSY for skipjack tuna and as high as 3.8% of the MSY for bigeye tuna. Protected species impacts have also been low and monitoring interactions with protected species is done by at-sea observers and is moving toward EM. The fisheries also occur in the upper part of the water column, negating potential impacts to benthic habitats that are thousands of meters deep.

The Council's options for meeting Proclamation 10918 include no action, or not removing the commercial fishing regulations; removing the commercial fishing prohibitions and restoring the fishing regulations that existed prior to prohibition; and the third option is to remove the commercial fishing prohibitions but limit the amount or type of commercial fishing that could be conducted.

Rosario said there is not a lot of activity going on and not enough data to support developing something like MSY for a fishery. To get there, data are needed to determine what the impacts could be.

Sword asked if there has been research on where the coral reefs are relative to these areas.

DeMello said there has been research on the coral reefs of the Pacific Remote Island Areas but typically they fall within the 50 nm from shore. There are deep coral reefs, but much of the area under consideration has not been mapped.

Sword said opposition to commercial fishing has always mentioned coral reefs being in the area but there is no data to support this claim.

Ramsey said the proclamation says that commercial fishing is going to happen and NOAA needs to respond to that. Unless the proclamation changes or the courts block it, it seems

like commercial fishing is inevitable. He said he appreciates this opportunity because the Council process is transparent and the public can get involved to inform the decision making. If the Council does not take action, other authorities will make that decision for the country, and those processes would not be transparent or allow people the opportunity to chime in. There is a perception that commercial fishing is happening in this area because the Council is driving it but that is not the case; the Council is responding to the presidential proclamation.

Ilaoa said option two, removing the commercial fishing prohibitions and returning to the existing regulations, best aligns with the proclamation and still affords all the protections that the monument is there to put in place.

Ramsey asked about the timeline for this action and what will happen with the different options.

DeMello said this is only the initial action and that the Council will get another opportunity to review this action and make recommendations at the time of final action. This is just the start of the process of developing an amendment to the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plans (FEPs) and the final action starts the process of transmitting the recommendation and amendment to NMFS. At that point, there would be an additional public process that includes a proposed rule and notice of rulemaking that requires public comment as well as a final rule that responds to the public comments. The process is rather lengthy and includes multiple opportunities for public comment and input from the Council's initial and final actions to the proposed and final rules through the federal rulemaking system.

Ramsey asked if there was a difference between options two and three.

DeMello said option three would ask staff to look at the regulatory framework that would be restored and provide a more detailed option for restricting commercial fishing. That could include a range of anything that would be supported by the review.

Sakoda asked whether NMFS would proceed with its own rulemaking to allow commercial fishing if the Council did not take action.

Tucher said there are options that NMFS is looking at but it is not optimum for the agency to do so independent of the Council. It would be preferred for the Council to look at alternatives. There are tools for NMFS to do unilateral rulemaking, but those are limited.

Simonds said if the Council wants to see the prohibition removed, it should go through the Council process, and that would be responsive to the judge's action.

Sakoda made reference to the no action option slide that said NMFS would work on implementing aspects of the proclamation, and asked for clarification on what that meant.

DeMello said if the Council decides to take no action, NMFS may do nothing or do a lot more than what the Council may want. If the Council wants to remove commercial fishing prohibitions, its process is transparent and provides opportunities for public engagement, unlike some other processes.

E. Report on Inflation Reduction Act Program Projects

Mitsuyasu, Council staff, introduced the IRA program project report. He said the individual contractors would provide updates at each meeting and described staff's efforts to

launch the next round of community meetings. He also played a video created to introduce the second round of meetings, which began in Kona and Hilo and encouraged public participation.

1. Scenario Planning

Kirsten Leong, social scientist and contractor, provided an update on the Scenario Planning Project being conducted on the longline fisheries in American Samoa and Hawai‘i. Scenario planning is a type of strategic planning that helps plan for the future by considering what might happen. This is especially important when future conditions may differ significantly from past management, and historical patterns no longer provide useful guidance because changes are occurring in new and unprecedented ways. Scenario planning helps with thinking about the different kinds of impacts, vulnerabilities and uncertainties, and how to be more resilient to these unanticipated changes. Scenario planning also ensures that goals and priorities are clearly articulated, and draws on aspects of business planning and disaster planning. The process is participatory thought exercises that provide a framework to think ahead in the face of change and uncertainty. The project team is in an exploratory phase, assessing what the future could look like, what it may mean for the system, and where potential vulnerabilities may lie.

The project objectives are to engage in collaborative dialogue with the fishing industries and communities to better understand current and anticipated challenges and articulate a long-term vision for viable and resilient longline fisheries. The project team is in the information gathering stage, thinking about what those scenarios might look like and checking in with the Council, NMFS staff, advisors and the steering committee. The plan is to put that information into different scenarios of the way things could unfold in the future and what that might mean. It will be followed by more intentional engagement processes in Hawai‘i and American Samoa. Those discussions are targeted for December through April 2026 and then organizing the results and findings and bringing it back to the group in the spring. The project team will focus on the most valuable outcomes of these processes, including a better understanding of the challenges ahead and how future conditions may create new ones. This would help ensure that the industry is better equipped to make business decisions and promote the long-term viability and resilience of the fisheries as well as better equip the Council to think about management measures and strategies that promote sustainable fisheries management.

2. Regulatory Review

Thomas Remington, Lynker, presented an update on the Regulatory Review Project. The project objectives are to determine potential gaps or misalignments in fishery regulation frameworks for the states and territories as well as the Council. The project is assessing if there is any redundancy, overlap or duplicity and if there are provisions that do not agree with one another to streamline the FEPs with other regulatory frameworks. The goal is to identify solutions that will be responsive to future changes and are adaptable to future management challenges. Recommendations will reflect a more efficient regulatory system for fisheries through the identification and removal of unnecessary or redundant provisions. The project team consists of Lynker staff providing project management and the Parnin Group providing program review and evaluation. The team did a full program evaluation for the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and is working on something similar for the New England Council.

The project team plans on conducting stakeholder engagement meetings in the jurisdictions to introduce the scope of the project, identify issues and concerns, and solicit input. The comprehensive analysis of existing regulations and management systems will identify potential gaps in Council, state, territory and local and federal fishing regulations that might limit

or prevent adaptability to sudden changes in the ecosystem. The project began in the summer 2025 and will provide progress and analytical reports later in the year, with public meetings in early 2026.

Ilaoa said the regulatory review is of great interest to American Samoa, which has quite a few outdated and even obsolete local regulations for fisheries. He said his staff has begun the process of identifying some of those regulations that need to be updated, removed or added and looked forward to engaging the project team on helping them inform their process.

Remington said the two processes align well and while the project does not look to make recommendations for American Samoa to change its regulations, it can identify those areas that overlap or could work collaboratively to ensure better alignment.

3. Protected Species

Remington presented an update on the Protected Species Project, which is being implemented by a team of contractors from Lynker, Fisheries Immersed Sciences Hawai'i and Neptune and Company. Under this project, two workshops will be convened to improve understanding of how climate and ecosystem drivers may impact protected species interaction rates in the region's fisheries, explore potential scenarios in which climate change impacts protected species interactions in fisheries, and identify potential strategies and frameworks for addressing those impacts. The contractor team has been working with Council staff and the steering committee to determine the focus of the first workshop, which is tentatively scheduled for Oct. 29-30, 2025.

The first workshop will convene relevant stakeholders to improve the understanding of how ecosystem drivers might interact with protected species populations trends and distributions, especially in terms of interactions between the Hawai'i longline fishery and protected species on a recovering trajectory. One example the workshop will focus on is the increased number of OWT interactions observed in the Hawai'i deep-set longline fishery in 2024, and whether that is due to the changes in fishery operations, population trends or other factors. The workshop will explore management responses to potential changes in interaction rates, methods for evaluating population-level risks and predicting the magnitude of future interactions, and strategies for managing those interactions while balancing the mandates of the MSA, ESA, MMPA and other applicable laws. The workshop will utilize a web-based structured decision-making tool that uses a decision science approach combining scientific understanding with values-focused thinking. The tool will provide a transparent and reproducible framework that facilitates movement from implicit to explicit space and allows a deeper exploration of the decision space.

4. Community Engagement/Capacity Building

Alex Min, Pacific Islands Fisheries Group, presented an update on the Community Engagement and Capacity-Building Project. This project was developed to listen, understand and hear from the communities on the challenges they are facing with climate change and an evolving ecosystem. It was also developed to host a pilot fishery training program for the Western Pacific region to build capacity in U.S. Pacific Island fisheries. The program has completed 18 meetings to date and has begun the second round of community meetings across the region, with sessions planned in Guam and the CNMI in October, American Samoa in November and meetings throughout Hawai'i in between. Takeaways from the first round have been invaluable and demonstrate that community members are eager to speak with the Council about what is happening in their fisheries. American Samoa's first round of meetings was

completed since the last Council meeting and participants reported their seasonal runs have changed, infrastructure is lacking and sharks are abundant. The second round of meetings kicked off on Hawai'i Island discussing boat ramp infrastructure and dredging in Hilo, as well as shark depredation and shortline fishing in Kona.

The Pacific Islands Vocational Fisher Training pilot program took place in Hawai'i over the previous week and included five participants from the region that ranged in age from 22 to 40. The training included both classroom and on-the-water sessions, including first aid and CPR certification, fisheries management, data collection, fish marketing workshops, fishing with experienced fishers, and fiberglass and boat repair. Participants were able to network and develop connections to understand the industry and the different fisheries. The plan is to assess what they have taken from this program and how they have applied it to their commercial fishing operations.

Ilaoa said he was present at the community engagement meetings held in American Samoa and that there were a lot of good outcomes. He said getting out to Manu'a was difficult but engaging the fishermen and the community provided a lot of great information. It has also helped direct local agency actions and funds DMWR has at its disposal for fisheries. The opportunity for people in the community to better understand some of these key issues facing the region is valuable and the team was able to garner quite a bit of community support. The vocational training program also addresses a key gap in fisheries.

Rosario said the Guam meetings earlier in the year had a good impact and showed the Council's willingness to help the fishing community. There was a sizable turnout in Malesso' and it started the dialogue and conversation about their fishing, and he looks forward to the report back to them.

Muña said the training program is great and although there was difficulty recruiting a participant for Guam, it could be really advantageous to the community. She said smaller events to garner interest for participation prior to recruitment may help as well.

Min said there were 50 applicants throughout the region but had some trouble recruiting in American Samoa, but that may have been due to not translating the application. There was strong interest, and word is expected to spread based on the activities of current participants. The participants noted the lack of opportunity and a struggling economy as reasons for applying.

F. Council Education and Outreach Report

Amy Vandehey, Council staff, presented the education and outreach report for the period of June through August. The Council's quarterly newsletter included a guest article by Ray Hilborn, SSC member and a University of Washington fisheries scientist, who wrote about tuna fishing's effects in the PIHNM. There were also articles on the WCPFC meetings leading up to the December meetings, the outcomes of the May Council Coordination Committee and an insert on the 2024 Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) reports. Outreach materials were produced, featuring maps that depict the development of fishery management regulations across island areas, including overlays of monument designations on Council regulations, and handouts detailing differences between federal and local shark regulations. The Council has also received media requests regarding topics discussed at Council meetings and the president's proclamation. Region-wide outreach included supporting the community consultation meetings to increase participation. This was done through newspaper ads, press releases, emails, flyers and social media. At the meetings, the Council shared outreach materials with participants.

The Council's June 2025 Fishers Forum with the theme "From Hanapa'a to How Much? What It Takes to Fish and Sell in Hawai'i" included 10 partner organizations and about 100 participants. Presentations covered the economic, regulatory and cultural challenges facing Hawai'i's fishing community.

In the territories, the Council supported different derbies including the 5th Annual Greg Perez International Sports Fishing Derby in Guam in August and the Saipan Fishermen's Association (SFA)'s 41st Annual Saipan International Fishing Tournament in July. The Council shared outreach materials at an informational booth, including newsletters, monographs, fish recipes and information on the Council process. The Council also had an outreach table at the Guam Mafute Kids Fishing Derby, and the CNMI I Sanhålom Laguna Anglers Association (ISLA) 6th Annual Mafuti Derby and Office of Youth Affairs Youth Shoreline Fishing Workshop.

G. Advisory Group Report and Recommendations

1. Advisory Panel

There were no AP recommendations for Program Planning and Research.

2. Fishing Industry Advisory Committee

Fitchett, Council staff, presented the FIAC recommendations on behalf of the committee chair.

Regarding shark depredation and research, the FIAC recommends development of shark depredation mitigation strategies and deterrents be included as a priority for cooperative research programs.

3. Fishery Data Collection and Research Committee

DeMello presented the Fishery Data Collection and Research Committee (FDCRC) on behalf of the committee chair from its August meeting.

Regarding the Standard Operating Policies and Procedures and Strategic Plan, the FDCRC recommends the Council:

- Direct staff to work with agency members of the FDCRC to review the strategic plan to provide comments by Oct. 5, 2025. The review may also consider moving toward making the strategic plan a higher-level document that deals with goals, objectives and strategies.
- Consider Council family changes to replace Terry Donaldson with Brett Taylor as the University of Guam (UOG) representative on the FDCRC-Technical Committee Research Panel. PIFSC will provide nominations for Council family changes prior to the next Council meeting.

Regarding annual SAFE report revamp, the FDCRC recommends the Council consider timelines required to develop new data systems when implementing new data collection protocols.

Regarding the fishery management plan (FMP) development and implementation, the FDCRC recommends the Council continue to encourage the territorial agencies to complete their respective territorial FMPs by Dec. 31, 2025.

Regarding alternative data collection approaches, the FDCRC recommends the Council:

- Request PIFSC and the territorial agencies work together on “right-sizing” the data collection efforts for those fisheries with low participation such as a full census of the boat-based fisheries and collecting additional length composition data from tournaments and derbies.
- Work with the territorial agencies to continue pursuing mandatory license and reporting.
- Work with PIFSC and the territorial agencies to address interest in developing electronic technologies that minimize the burden on fishers and maximize data collection, such as tablets, fish mats and cameras for length measurements, etc.
- Work with PIFSC in coordinating with the Pacific Community (SPC) in scoping the feasibility of using the IkaSavea app to collect fishery dependent information in the U.S. territories.

4. Scientific and Statistical Committee

Franklin, SSC member, presented the SSC recommendations.

Regarding the PIFSC director report, the SSC requests PIFSC provide a full presentation on the MHI insular FKW abundance estimate publication (including information on evidence of fishery interactions) at the December Council meeting. The SSC further requests an update on the genetic sampling of the green sea turtle nesting population at Marine Corp Base Hawai‘i Kāne‘ohe when the information becomes available.

Regarding the Fisheries Integrated Modeling System, the SSC nominated Milani Chaloupka to represent the Council at the Center for Independent Experts review.

Regarding the SSC Special Projects on Integration of Biological, Economic, Social and Cultural Considerations, the SSC adopts the following guiding principles for developing SSC recommendations:

- As a general rule, the SSC will strive to develop consensus-based recommendations to the Council;
- When the SSC does not reach consensus, the SSC will present majority recommendations in its report accompanied by a clear description of dissenting views;
- SSC recommendations should be based on a holistic understanding of issues, incorporating biological, ecological, economic, social and cultural information; and
- SSC recommendations should explicitly flag situations in which meaningful engagement with affected communities, cultures, fishers and industry is lacking or insufficient.

Regarding the SSC Special Projects on Bottomfish Management Unit Species (BMUS)

Multispecies Complex, the SSC endorses the proposed updated framework for work to be undertaken by the Western Pacific region (included in the SSC report as Appendix A).

The SSC endorses the proposed additional projects and recommends that the Council explore funding for one or both of these SSC-led projects in collaboration with PIFSC and the applicable state and/or territorial agencies.

- 1) Multispecies Complex Evaluation: identifying a subset of BMUS, as a case study, that could then be used for either a single assessment of that reduced-set complex or individual assessment for each species identified in that reduced-set complex. It is proposed that this would be well suited to applying hierarchical dynamic generalized

additive models estimated within a fully Bayesian framework to support both hind-cast and near-cast forecasting.

- 2) Dynamic Bioeconomic-Based Standardization: assuming either individual BMUS species for a reduced-set BMUS and also assuming adequate data availability. The working group proposed a nonlinear structural equation-based modelling approach within a fully Bayesian framework to standardize catch per unit effort (CPUE) times series coupled with equations defining the socioeconomic drivers of fisher behavior including effort investment, fish processing and vessel operating costs.

Regarding the Social, Economic, Ecological and Management Uncertainty (SEEM) Process Review Report, the SSC recommends the Council review the ACL process and consider revising the SEEM scoring method to 1) avoid double counting of the same uncertainties between P* and SEEM; and 2) allow positive and negative scores within each SEEM factor.

Regarding the review and update of research priorities, the SSC recommends that the Council identify, among the 2025-2029 Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act (MSRA) Research Priorities Plan, as the highest priorities for 2026 for NMFS and other entities:

- 1) Mitigation of depredation to reduce incidental interactions in U.S. Pacific Island fisheries (PF5). The SSC notes this priority should also include fishery operational characteristics that could reduce depredation. NMFS could improve information on depredation events for incorporation in stock assessments;
- 2) Improved pelagic FKW assessments on the high seas with a focus of delineating full stock range based on robust biological data (PS2.2.1). Inclusion of other available data, including tagging and acoustic data can fulfill this priority to better discern information beyond the EEZ and among the range of the species where it overlaps with U.S. fisheries; and
- 3) Understanding the effects of spatial closures and large-scale MPAs on fisheries, island communities, and population dynamics on target and non-target species (PF2); which complements the priority to assess the human dimensions of U.S. Pacific Marine managed areas (such as area closures or MPAs) regarding procedural and distributive justice, transferred economic, social and ecological effects, and safety. (HC 3.1.2)

The SSC recommends that the Council amend the Five-Year 2025-2029 MSRA Research Priorities Plan in 2026 to consider and focus on:

- 1) Research to facilitate fishery development and capacity-building for Pacific Island fisheries;
- 2) Evaluation of the efficacy of MMPA Import Provisions on conservation and economic impacts to U.S. fisheries;
- 3) Research to improve efficiency of Western Pacific fisheries, noting current challenging economic conditions; and
- 4) Research needs emerging from Council IRA projects.

Regarding the multi-species impact considerations for the SEZ closures, the SSC concludes that this study provides empirical evidence that SEZ closures can have potential unintended effects of effort displacement on protected species interactions. The SSC recommends that the analysis be expanded to determine whether SEZ closures have contributed to a change in total interactions for the respective species. The SSC further recommends future spatial measures include a prospective evaluation of potential unintended impacts on protected species at the time that such measures are designed.

H. Public Comment

Joe Hamby, Tri Marine, provided comment on EO14276 and its direct application to American Samoa and its tuna-dependent economy. Section 4(d) of the EO directs the secretary of commerce in consultation with the secretary of agriculture to promote production of U.S. fishery products and to strengthen domestic fish processing capacity. This applies to American Samoa and requires investment in production facilities and more fish supply, noting that the U.S. tuna market is quite mature and is not growing. He said there needs to be ways to grow the market through promotion and consumption-based programs like the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s school lunch programs. Whether or not tuna consumption increases, imported tuna products need to be replaced with tuna products that are produced in American Samoa. Reciprocal tariffs that have been implemented by this administration have helped the competitiveness of American Samoa with respect to the U.S. market, but needs to do more. Section 4(f) of the EO instructs the U.S. trade representative to correctly apply origin rules to imported tuna products, especially tuna loins produced from Chinese-flagged longliners. This fish enters the U.S. market labeled as a product of Thailand and other countries, while U.S. law says that it should be labeled as Chinese origin. The U.S. consumers are unknowingly supporting the highly subsidized and forced labor Chinese fishing industry. He said there is a need for an increased fish supply to support the higher levels of tuna production in American Samoa. The U.S. boats need access to the monuments outside of 50 miles. This will make them more efficient. These U.S.-flagged American Samoa-based boats should be regulated as a SIDS fleet without fishing-day limits on the high seas and with exemptions to FAD closures in U.S. waters.

Makaala Kaaumoana, Hā'ena, Kaua'i, said her family are fishers, weavers, hunters and *maka'āinana* in the places most dependent and impacted by the depletion of resources in the Pacific. She said they came from those *kūpuna* islands, Papahānaumokuākea, and are critically connected to their fate. She also said they share cultural and spiritual DNA with those of the Pacific Islands Heritage area and know these places and stood for their protection as the sources of their past, present and future. It was not easy to limit their own access, but they understood that these places must also exist as the foundations of survival in order for their people and culture to exist. They recognized their *kuleana* (responsibility) to protect and preserve and fight for safe regions for life to continue and actively participated in the work to draw the lines and tell the stories of designated these areas. She said they wanted more room for the things they eat to grow and live, but recognized that they also need to eat now. Today, once more, they resist the expansionist ignorance of those who want more today, disregarding the impacts on the future. There are no mysteries; if these places called *pu'uhonua* (sanctuary) are invaded and depleted, it affects everyone. All will suffer, not just the creatures and not just the people. The planet itself will be out of balance, not *pono*, and not survivable. Any reductions in the size of protections in these biological banks will cost everyone.

Jacob Hauoli Ikaika Pookela Lorenzo-Elarco, Waimea, Hawai'i provided comment on commercial fishing in Papahānaumokuākea and other MPAs at the request of a Council member who asked at the last meeting to hear from "the real Hawaiians." He said his genealogy stretches

back to the time of primordial darkness in Hawaiian cosmology through countless generations along the Pacific migration routes to Hawai‘i and the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) now known as Papahānaumokuākea. His family are fishers and a key tradition among Hawaiian families is that they only fish in their backyard, within the coasts and waters of their own land. Fishing beyond one's borders is considered disrespectful, bad form and a breach of protocol. He said he firmly opposes commercial fishing and other extractive and destructive activities like deep-sea mining, and allowing commercial fishing in Papahānaumokuākea is beyond disrespectful, bad form and a breach of protocol. He said the Council continues to disregard the long public process and community consultation that established the current state, federal, international and cultural protections of Papahānaumokuākea. He is disappointed at the Council's rhetoric that "these are American waters and American fishermen have the right to fish there." Papahānaumokuākea is in Hawaiian waters and no one has the right to fish there. Papahānaumokuākea is among the largest MPAs in the world and one of the last truly wild places. For perspective, if the Pacific Ocean were a football field, Papahānaumokuākea would be the size of a mere postage stamp. Yet this Council focuses its efforts on the portion of that tiny spot. It is a fallacy to think that fishing in the 50-200-mile zone does not affect what happens within the 50-mile zone, as fishing debris chokes the reefs, shorelines and wildlife in Papahānaumokuākea. Protecting Papahānaumokuākea ensures it remains a sanctuary and nursery that strengthens the ocean as a whole through spillover effects. The ecosystem found in Papahānaumokuākea is an ancestral legacy from the *Kumulipo*, a cosmogonic chant that breathes life into the natural world. As Native Hawaiians, Papahānaumokuākea runs through their veins, its waterways are memories of oceanic migration paths connecting to every living creature and island in the vast ocean of Moananuiākea. For thousands of years, *kūpuna* manifested Papahānaumokuākea's pristine beauty and sacredness for the benefit of today's generation and for the next thousand generations. Yet, in just a few short years, the Council stands to destroy it all through extractive activities like commercial fishing and deep-sea mining. He said to not be the generation of short sight. Papahānaumokuākea and other MPAs were created not for greed, but for the benefit of future generations and are off-limits to commercial fishing.

Kekuewa Kikilo, associate professor at the Kamakakū‘okalani Center for Hawaiian Studies and part of the leadership for the Papahānaumokuākea Cultural Working Group, provided comments on the proposal to allow commercial fishing in the marine national monuments in the Pacific. Knowledge of the past is important to guide the future in a responsible manner. This generational knowledge is valuable because it is compounded over time, accumulating from first-hand experience of living on these islands. The *kūpuna* or elders that had knowledge of these fisheries in this region have since passed but their *mana‘o* (knowledge) has informed the cultural working group's position on fishing since the working group's inception. Uncle Buzzy Agard, Uncle Kawika Kapahulehua, Uncle Eddie Kaanaana, Uncle Walter Paulo, Uncle Leo Ohai, Uncle Val Ako, and other great fishermen helped to shape their values regarding resource use. As Uncle Kawika would say, “*Na mālama ‘oe i ke kai, mālama no ke kai iā ‘oe. I na mālama i ka ‘āina, mālama no ka ‘āina iā ‘oe* (If you care for the ocean, the ocean will care for you. If you care for the land, the land will care for you).” They always stressed the importance of reciprocity and the duty to take care of the resource first. These uncles were staunch in their position that the NWHI should be an MPA. They witnessed the decline and the crash of fish stocks as well as the lobster fishery during their lifetime. There was clear recognition that this region cannot sustain commercial fishing and that high levels of extraction, especially longline fishing, was incompatible with this place. The region instead is a complex, interconnected and delicate marine ecosystem that is important as a refuge, and the only type of extraction that should be done here is subsistence, only when necessary. Uncle Buzzy Agard spent most of his time as a fisherman in this region, was on the Council, and was a foundational

kūpuna to the cultural working group. He was adamant about protection and leaving the *pu'uhonua* alone and said “let us try to save this place. I don’t think the Great Barrier Reef...is being sold off as a place to go fishing. That is why we need regulations. So, speak up and say this. This is what we think. We need to preserve it. The vision says ‘and abundant forever.’ That is our statement. I believe in that.” He said they remember and appreciate all the *kūpuna* that dedicated their lives to this protection and inspired a whole generation of young Hawaiians to believe in this vision as demonstrated in their 25-year commitment toward this cause.

Manuel Dueñas, Guam Fishermen’s Cooperative Association, commented that the DOC should reorganize NMFS to put ESA and MMPA under the MSA because MSA is the actual legal authority for all resources on a regional basis. He said Sea Grant is not equivalent to the Land Grant institutions that help farmers and develop aquaculture, and that Sea Grant has been an impediment to fisheries on Guam. He said biological opinions should be revisited and the conservation measures that have been implemented over the years be evaluated. He also said he does not like to use the words “commercial fishing” because there are no commercial fishermen in Hawai‘i, American Samoa and the Mariana Islands. They are all community-based fisheries and owned by a family living in those places. Those fisheries operate for the benefit of the community and not for the world.

Kanoe Morishige, assistant professor at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM)’s Kamakakū‘okalani Center for Hawaiian Studies and co-founder of Nā Maka Onaona, provided comments in strong opposition to opening commercial fishing in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and the PIHMNM. She said she is thankful to have learned from *kūpuna*, those living and those who live on through their successors and ‘*ohana* (family), and the communities. She said she traveled to Papahānaumokuākea nine times, leading intertidal research, studying *mo‘olelo* (stories) and participating in an ‘*Ōlelo Hawai‘i* (Hawaiian language) immersion trip to *Kuaihelani* (Midway Atoll). She said these experiences affirm that Papahānaumokuākea is a realm for reverence, not extraction. As with the *mauna* (mountains) that are considered *wao akua* (the realm of the gods), certain ocean spaces were governed by *kapu* (restrictions) to protect their integrity. Papahānaumokuākea is one such ‘*aina akua* (land of the gods), where access is guided by ancestral knowledge, *kuleana* and cultural protocol. Traditionally, Papahānaumokuākea was not *noa* (open to all). For more than 20 years, Native Hawaiian leadership, rooted in *kūpuna*, has guided the protection of this special place. The late Uncle Buzzy Agard was adamant about the harm he and others had caused there, calling for this place to be protected as a *pu'uhonua*. Allowing commercial extraction here would betray that vision. Commercial extraction directly conflicts with the value of reciprocity and place-based practices that bind people as *Kanaka ‘Oiwī*, as Native Hawaiians, to this biocultural seascape. Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument already provides permits for Native Hawaiian practices, education and research access. Not all ocean spaces are for profit. She said strong protections that are worthy of a place like Papahānaumokuākea must be maintained as a sanctuary that safeguards a globally unique seascape for future generations.

Kaipu Keala, assistant professor at Kamakakū‘okalani Center for Hawaiian Studies at UHM, commented in strong opposition to commercial fishing in Papahānaumokuākea. At the core of all Hawaiian thought is the essential distinction between the unfathomable life-giving powers of the world and the self-serving interests of humanity. These different registers are named *kapu* and *noa*. What is *kapu* is essentially what is prohibited, what is sacredly beyond humanity, while *noa* stands for an absence of *kapu*, the presence of all things corruptible by wealth and other earthly concerns. The NWHI of Papahānaumokuākea are, both scientifically and culturally, the oldest islands in the archipelago. They are *kūpuna* islands. When *Kanaka* passed, they passed into the night from whence all life came and returned to *pō* (darkness).

Outlined in the *Mai Ka Pō Mai* management plan of Papahānaumokuākea is the insight from the 'Ohana Wa'a navigators, who have identified the scientific and celestial significance of this seemingly strictly spiritual designation as *Ke Ala Polohiwa a Kāne*, the Tropic of Cancer, which celestially cuts through Papahānaumokuākea, designating the boundary limit of the sun in summer, positioning the beyond of the sun as being in *pō*. Even as the islands have ceded their roles as primary life-givers to humans, they have not surrendered their life-giving properties. They have become instead the bedrock of all marine life, for not only the archipelago, but for much of Oceania. This phenomenon has been scientifically substantiated by the spillover effect of *kapu*, prohibited areas, that sustain the foundation of life. This suggests that Hawaiian interests are knotted up with commercial fishing. Everyone wants plenty of fish in the ocean, but that productivity cannot exist when the integrity of the ecosystem is compromised by excessive extraction that senselessly wastes fish labeled as bycatch. The collective desire confirms that everyone wants this ecosystem integrity sustained as evidenced by the extensive public process that the sanctuary designation went through. To undermine that is to go against the wishes of not only *Kanaka*, but Americans. It is also contradictory to what commercial fishing wants. These pristine, fragile and irreplaceable places are some of the last healthy ocean ecosystems on the planet. Humanity has collectively recognized its seminal importance. *Kanaka Maoli* (Native people) called it *kapu*. America called it sanctuary designation or commercial fishing prohibitions. At the end of the day, what is *kapu* is not to be touched because it gives us the things that we can touch, things we can consume. That is why Papahānaumokuākea must remain closed to all extractive practices, including commercial fishing, fishing that recuperates costs, deep-sea mining, and all other activities catering to human greed over planetary well-being.

Leina'ala Ley, chief advocate for the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA), provided comments in strong opposition to the Council's proposal to reopen the monument to commercial fishing. OHA is charged by the Hawai'i Constitution with advocating for the betterment of Native Hawaiians and is also co-trustee of Papahānaumokuākea, along with the State of Hawai'i, the Department of the Interior and the DOC. This proposal would roll back decades of regulations that were put in place at the urging of Native Hawaiian leaders and others to protect this place as a *pu'uhonua* for cultural and biological rejuvenation. The first reason for opposition is the documented harm and destruction caused by commercial fishing to culturally and ecologically sensitive species, including but not limited to sea turtles and monk seals, specifically those in the NWHI. These species are significant culturally and are overwhelmingly impacted by commercial fishing. In the 2014 logbook report for the NWHI fisheries, it showed that for every three tuna caught, one *manō* (shark) was killed. With bigeye tuna, that increased to one *manō* for every two fish that were caught. These are incredible rates of bycatch that have a very negative effect on the ecosystem. MPAs actually have benefits for fishermen as well as the ocean species. From across the world, science has repeatedly demonstrated that the benefits, or the spillover effects from MPAs, more than make up for the initial loss and access to a formerly fished area. Over time, fishermen benefit from these *pu'uhonua*, these areas of rejuvenation, where populations are able to restock and eventually cross over the ocean boundaries where they can be caught and put back into food production. OHA supports other less harmful options to support commercial fisheries. One such measure passed this past legislative session at the Hawai'i state level for poke labeling to ensure that country of origin is available to consumers so that fishermen can capture the consumer willingness to pay extra for fish that are caught under the standards of American fisheries with higher health and environmental regulations. This is something that could also be implemented at the federal level to allow country of origin labeling so that fishermen can benefit from the higher regulations but also not having to put at risk MPAs. She said both are achievable, and it is a false dichotomy to pick between the economic benefits and the cultural and ecological benefits.

Alan Friedlander, affiliate researcher at the Hawai‘i Institute of Marine Biology, member of the Pacific Islands Heritage Coalition, and recently retired chief scientist for National Geographic Pristine Seas, commented that Papahānaumokuākea and the Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monuments are among the last remaining wild intact ecosystems on the planet. Papahānaumokuākea is deeply connected culturally, ecologically and evolutionarily to the MHI and *Kalama* (Johnston Atoll) is strongly connected to the entire Hawaiian Archipelago for the same reasons. These connections are critical to the vitality of these ecosystems, not just Hawai‘i but the broader Pacific community that depend on them. The Hawai‘i longline fishery is not losing revenue because of these monuments and it has shown to benefit them by catching more fish adjacent to the monument boundaries through spillover. Industrial scale fishing is inconsistent with the nearly pristine nature of these marine wildernesses, as these fisheries kill, injure and disrupt natural pathways for charismatic megafauna such as sharks, sea turtles, marine mammals and seabirds. Many of these species are already at critically low levels globally and are unable to sustain even modest losses due to fishing mortality. These species are essential to the health of the entire ecosystem and by connecting the nearshore with the offshore waters through complex and dynamic nutrient coupling. In addition to large-scale industrial fishing, deep-sea mining is now also a threat to these ecosystems. As climate change threatens ecosystems worldwide, the best near-term solutions are to reduce or remove local threats such as industrial scale fishing and deep-sea mining. By safeguarding these places, it also safeguards the cultural heritage and livelihoods of future generations.

William Aila, fisherman from Wai‘ānae, O‘ahu, commented on transparency saying that it is not transparent to say that the Council is responding to the president’s EO. He said large commercial interests and the Council’s interests went to the president as soon as he was re-elected and lobbied for these EOs. He said he has been involved with the Council for almost 40 years and was interested in the Council’s July 25, 2025, letter to the secretary of commerce. The letter states it was the declining CPUE in the bottomfish fishery that caused the Council to enact regulations such as limited entry, fishing zones and trip limits. To state now in that letter that the regulatory burdens were the real cause for the reduced landing is ludicrous as it was the Council that created those regulations. The same letter talks about the decline of the lobster fishery, which was due to overharvesting of spiny lobsters and later slipper lobsters, but counting them together so that the CPUE did not drop, and then making a very bad decision and allowing for lobsters with eggs to be taken amounts to mismanagement. The letter also does not mention taking lobsters with eggs, which Aila said was more revisionist history. The Council says in the letter that many Native Hawaiians spoke in favor of commercial fishing but never mentioned that in many meetings of the Council and in the creation of the monuments, the overwhelming majority of Native Hawaiians and non-Native Hawaiians spoke to prohibit commercial fishing. Based on this continuing mismanagement, many were inspired to protect these places, Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Sanctuary and PIHMNM. The more research and connections to Papa and these other monuments by Native Hawaiians only serve to secure the sacredness of Papa as a *pu‘uhonua*. *Pu‘uhonua* is described in *Mai Ka Pō Mai* as a person or a place of refuge, sanctuary, asylum or place of safety. To allow return to mismanagement is a violation of the spirit of the National Marine Sanctuary Act. Papahānaumokuākea is a marine sanctuary, and extraction for extraction's sake is not *pono*. There has been lots of discussion about science, the science of MPAs and there is disagreement on the science. The MSA says that if there is disagreement on science, the precautionary principle should be applied. The precautionary principle in this case is option one, no action. The proposed action of permitting the return of commercial fishing in the monuments and in Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Sanctuary would not, under any analysis, be consistent with the goals and objectives of the national marine sanctuary, nor would it be consistent with the goals and objections of Presidents

Clinton, Bush and Obama's EOs. The fisheries management actions in the FMPs described by staff including limited entry, VMSs, area closures, tuna circle hooks, seabird mitigation, blackfish mitigation, sea turtle mitigation and observer coverage were forced on the Council by small-boat fishermen to make those measures. When small-boat fishermen could not do it, Earthjustice and fishermen sued and got federal judges to make NMFS do it. Rachel Maddow on MSNBC said, "watch what they do and not what they say." He said he has been watching for 40 years and will continue to watch.

Iilana Nimz, Friends of Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, commented that her group was founded to connect people with the nature and culture of Papahānaumokuākea through education and outreach in support of the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, which is part of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and advocate for the preservation of the natural and cultural resources of the monument. She said the Friends of Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge opposes the regulatory changes including lifting the fishing restrictions in Papahānaumokuākea and other Pacific marine national monuments. This protected area was approved through an extensive public process, including Native Hawaiian advocates, community groups, scientists, conservationists, bipartisan politicians and the public. It is important to uphold these MPAs for the long-term health of both the fisheries and the natural ecosystem. Research clearly finds that the establishment of monuments has no negative impact on fisheries and that these MPAs increase fish biomass and create safe spawning areas. A recent paper showed that the protected status of Papahānaumokuākea increased the biomass of two commercially fished migratory species, bigeye and yellowfin tuna. Protecting monuments from fishing preserves these natural resources and provides a long-term benefit for the fishing industry as well as biodiversity and cultural heritage. Papahānaumokuākea is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site for both natural and cultural resources, and endangered and threatened species rely on this protected marine resource to thrive. She said it is clear that opening Papahānaumokuākea to fishing will not solve the problems outlined in the Council's meeting, especially in the long-term. Establishing safe reproductive habitats is a central part of sustainable fisheries management and community connection to this remote location.

Kaehukai Goin, lead marine debris technician for the Papahānaumokuākea Marine Debris Project, said he fully stands in opposition to commercial fishing and any other extraction of natural resources. As a young Native Hawaiian fisherman and student of life, he said he has given a huge portion of his life to protecting these ancestral resources of Papahānaumokuākea. Even with no permanent human presence in these *kūpuna* islands, he continues to come across commercial fishing gear that is lost or abandoned. The destruction from these derelict nets is beyond fathomable, killing off many marine mammals, sharks and corals. Introducing commercial fishing into a sacred space already affected by the rest of the world's fishing is heavy. He said he has helped to physically lift over a million pounds of this marine debris in the past five years and encouraged the Council to think of the devastation caused by introducing these fisheries firsthand to Papahānaumokuākea and what that will do. He said if that is too hard to fathom, he encouraged members to try and lift a hundred pounds of trash over and over for a couple of hours and see what it does just to one spot.

Ramsey thanked all the people that took time to provide testimony and asked staff to consult with them when they do their analysis before the next Council meeting.

I. Council Discussion and Action

Regarding commercial fishing prohibitions in the PIHNM expansion area, the Council:

1. **Selected option 3 as a preliminarily preferred option and directs staff to work with NMFS to identify monument resources that may be impacted by the restoration of commercial fishing in the PIHMNM expansion area around Jarvis Island, Wake Atoll, and Johnston Atoll; Further, the Council directed staff to prepare an analysis of management options to implement Presidential Proclamation 10918, “Unleashing American Commercial Fishing in the Pacific,” and ensure sustainable harvest of fishery resources and reduce imported seafood while conserving protected species and monument resources for the Council’s consideration at its December meeting.**

Moved by Ilaoa, seconded by Itibus.

Motion passed.

Regarding the fishing in the other marine national monuments, the Council:

2. **Endorsed the review letter sent to the secretary of commerce July 24, 2025, responding to EO 14276 section 4(h) and directed staff to initiate an analysis of options to remove commercial fishing regulations and impacts to resources in the remaining marine national monuments for Council discussion at its December meeting.**

Moved by Itibus, seconded by Ilaoa.

Motion passed with Malloy abstaining.

Regarding the seafood EO recommendations, the Council:

3. **Directed staff to finalize the updated seafood EO recommendations for transmittal.**
4. **Directed staff to work with NMFS to develop a plan and schedule for considering Council actions identified in the seafood EO recommendations, and provide a report at the December 2025 meeting.**

Moved by Itibus, seconded by Rosario.

Motion passed with Malloy abstaining.

Regarding shark depredation and research, the Council:

5. **Directed staff to work with NMFS and industry to add development of shark depredation mitigation strategies and deterrents as a priority for cooperative research programs.**

Moved by Itibus, seconded by Perez.

Motion passed.

Regarding the Standard Operating Policies and Procedures and Strategic Plan, the Council:

6. **Directed staff to work with agency members of the FDCRC to review the strategic plan to provide comments by Oct. 5, 2025. The review may also consider moving toward making the strategic plan a higher-level document that deals with goals, objectives and strategies.**

Moved by Itibus, seconded by Ilaoa.

Motion passed.

Regarding alternative data collection approaches, the Council:

7. Requested NMFS PIFSC and the territorial agencies work together on “right-sizing” the data collection efforts for those fisheries with low participation such as a full census of the boat-based fisheries and collecting additional length composition data from tournaments and derbies.
8. Directed staff to work with the territorial agencies to continue pursuing mandatory license and reporting.
9. Directed staff to work with NMFS PIFSC and the territorial agencies to address interest in developing electronic technologies that minimize the burden on fishers and maximize data collection, such as tablets, fish mats and cameras for length measurements.
10. Requested NMFS PIFSC coordinate with SPC in scoping the feasibility of using the Ikaavea app to collect fishery dependent information in the U.S. territories.

*Moved by Ilaoa, seconded by Rosario.
Motion passed.*

Regarding the FMP development and implementation, the Council:

11. Encouraged the territorial agencies to complete their respective territorial FMPs by Dec. 31, 2025.

*Moved by Ilaoa, seconded by Perez.
Motion passed.*

Regarding the SSC report, the Council:

12. Requested NMFS PIFSC to provide a full presentation on the MHI insular FKW abundance estimate publication as well as information on evidence of fishery interactions at the December SSC and Council meetings. The Council further requested NMFS PIFSC to provide an update on the genetic sampling of the green sea turtle nesting population at Marine Corp Base Hawai‘i Kāne‘ohe when the information becomes available.
13. Endorsed the nomination for Milani Chaloupka to represent the Council at the Center for Independent Experts review for the Fisheries Integrated Modeling System, and directs staff to send the nomination to NMFS.
14. Endorsed the SSC’s conclusion that the recent NMFS PIFSC publication provides empirical evidence that the SEZ closure can have potential unintended effects of effort displacement on protected species interactions, and directed staff to incorporate the SSC’s findings and recommendations into the seafood EO updated recommendations.
15. Endorsed the SSC’s guiding principles for developing recommendations.
16. Endorsed the proposed Workflow for Selecting Stock Assessment Strategies in the Pacific Islands Region.

- 17. Directed staff to work with the SSC to explore next steps for the follow-up projects for the BMUS special projects working group, subject to availability of funds.**

Moved by Itibus, seconded by Perez.

Motion passed.

Regarding the SEEM process review, the Council:

- 18. Directed staff to review the ACL process including P* and SEEM, taking into account the SSC recommendations on these processes.**

Moved by Perez, seconded by Rosario.

Motion passed.

Regarding the update to the 2025-2029 MSRA Research Priorities and 2026 annual priorities, the Council:

- 19. Directed staff to work with advisory groups and the SSC to update the Five-Year Research Priorities Plan in 2026 to consider and focus on the following:**
- **Research to facilitate fishery development and capacity-building for Pacific Island fisheries;**
 - **Evaluation of the efficacy of MMPA Import Provisions on conservation and economic impacts to U.S. fisheries;**
 - **Research to improve efficiency of Western Pacific fisheries noting current challenging economic conditions; and**
 - **Research needs emerging from Council IRA projects.**
- 20. Recommended among the current 2025-2029 MSRA Research Priorities Plan, as the highest priorities for NMFS and other entities to address in 2026:**
- **Mitigation of depredation to reduce incidental interactions in U.S. Pacific Island fisheries (PF5). The SSC notes this priority should also include fishery operational characteristics that could reduce depredation. NMFS could improve information on depredation events for incorporation in stock assessments;**
 - **Improved pelagic FKW assessments on the high seas with a focus of delineating full stock range based on robust biological data (PS2.2.1). Inclusion of other available data, including tagging and acoustic data can fulfill this priority to better discern information beyond the EEZ and among the range of the species where it overlaps with U.S. fisheries; and**
 - **Understanding the effects of spatial closures and large-scale MPAs on fisheries, island communities, and population dynamics on target and non-target species (PF2); which complements the priority to assess the human dimensions of U.S. Pacific marine managed areas (such as area closures or MPAs) regarding procedural and distributive justice, transferred economic, social and ecological effects, and safety. (HC 3.1.2)**

Moved by Perez, seconded by Weaver.

Motion passed.

IX. Mariana Archipelago

A. Guam

1. Isla Informe

Perez reported on the first annual Council, Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources (DAWR), and Malesso' Village Boat-Based Kids Derby in Cocos Lagoon. The event, supported by the Greg D. Perez Foundation, PIFSC and the USCG Auxiliary, included 30 kids from 5-16 years old and 14 small boats. Most were family members, including parents. Malesso' Mayor Anthony Champaco is looking at linking the event with the village's annual *Fiestan Tasi* (water festival) next year. He said Guam's economic state is close to desperate. Businesses continue to suffer from lack of spending by tourists. The Rolex and luxury goods retailers have closed. Tony Roma's restaurant, in operation for more than 40 years, has closed. Most hotels are experiencing a low 20-50% occupancy. Without the spending by the military for lodging during exercises, many more would have shut down. This impacts the local fishery as fishermen try to find ways to sell their catch to offset their costs. Use of social media to sell catch has become commonplace. Fishers also sell roadside, at the flea market, at fish markets and to a few restaurants. The government needs to do what it can to reverse this dire situation and help fishermen provide sustainable and safe seafood to their families and the community. Guam also needs to find viable alternative industries, including a fishing industry, to help the economy grow for a better quality of life for the people. Recently, the military held its largest exercise to date in the region called REFORPAC from July 9 to August 8. More than 400 joint and coalition aircraft and more than 12,000 members trained in Guam, all along the Mariana Archipelago and the region. They filled hotel rooms, restaurants and bars, and took all available rental vehicles. They also kept fishing charters busy. Pacific Vanguard returned August 24 to September 23 with ships from naval forces of the United States, Japan, South Korea and Australia and more than 1,500 personnel. Rest and recuperation activities for the crews are expected to provide an additional boost to Guam's struggling economy. Numerous carriers and large navy vessels made port visits as part of the exercise.

Rosario reported the Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association's construction has stopped while the design is being vetted to ensure there is enough space to accommodate the fueling station, loading/offloading area, retail space and parking. The U.S. military plans to spend \$12 million to rehabilitate the Republic of Palau's dock to accommodate military vessels, large commercial vessels and smaller boats. Meanwhile, in Guam the military has no plans to spend any amount to improve marine infrastructure to offset the massive military expansion and Department of Defense population growth. He said the 5th Annual Greg D. Perez Fishing Tournament was held August 9-10 out of Agat and Agaña marinas with 92 boats participating. The catch was small due to unusually flat and warm seas. The Council had an outreach table at the Agat Marina where Council and DAWR staff members were the weighmasters.

2. Department of Agriculture/Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources Report

Muñia presented the DAWR report. A memorandum of understanding had been signed between DAWR and the Port Authority of Guam to conduct pre-construction work at the Harbor of Refuge, install a gangway for transient vessels, assess the Agat and Agaña Greg D. Perez Marinas for recreational vessel pump out services and repair the Agat Marina's southern walkway in FY2026. DAWR has also initiated a draft memorandum of understanding with the Port Authority for the Malesso Pier and boat ramp project to explore alternative procurement options and a partnership to repair or renovate the ramp. The agency is working with SPC to explore biodegradable and lighter buoys for FADs, including reducing the weight of anchors from two tons to one ton, reflecting similar sizes used in the CNMI. She said talks are ongoing with the U.S. Navy to adopt shallow-water mooring buoys on Navy property. Boat ramps,

fishing platforms and cultural signs around the island are undergoing maintenance. She said five abandoned illegal gillnets were pulled from Guam's waters, with one having eight blacktip sharks caught in it.

Regarding the Guam FMP, four community meetings were held from April to now. Polls taken at the meetings showed overwhelming support for the proposed regulations. The most contentious item was the moratorium on night-time spearfishing. Work is also ongoing with NOAA and the Department of Defense, to monitor sea turtle nesting activities including examination of hormone levels from collected blood samples and gonads. She said DAWR's education and outreach coordinator recently returned from training on outreach opportunities, resulting in her planning for and executing "Gineftao: Understanding the Ocean, Honoring our Home" exhibit at the Guam Museum from September 2 to October 3. Work is also ongoing with the Coral Reef Conservation Program, including coral reef restoration, partnerships and community engagement. The 2024-2025 U.S. Pacific Territories Capacity-Building Scholarship recipient was hired Aug. 11, 2025, at DAWR as a biologist to work on turtle programs, permits, surveys and outreach and education. Muña noted Frank Roberto is the acting assistant chief for aquaculture, replacing Mike Ogo who recently passed away. Roberto submitted a grant proposal to establish an in-house multi-species hatchery to address an industry bottleneck in the expansion and development of an aquaculture industry.

B. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

1. Arongol Falú

Weaver reported on five fishing derbies held in the CNMI, including two pelagic, one shallow bottom and two youth shoreline tournaments. SFA hosted its 41st Annual Saipan International Fishing Tournament July 12–13, 2025, with a record participation of 75 vessels, including 29 from Guam. The grand prize went to a 241-pound marlin, while category winners included a 213-pound billfish, 79.1-pound yellowfin, 29.8-pound wahoo and 20-pound skipjack. The Marianas Visitors Authority organized the accompanying Saipan International Fishing Tournament Festival July 13, featuring educational and cultural exhibits by the Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), 500 Sails, the Department of Public Safety and other partners. Activities included children's fishing tournaments, cast-net contests, cultural mapping and seafood preparation demonstrations by the Northern Marianas Technical Institute. ISLA held its 6th Annual Mafuti Derby Aug. 23, 2025. The heaviest *mafute*' (emperor species) weighed 8.2 pounds, and the heaviest trevally caught during in-lagoon trolling weighed 8.55 pounds. Two youth shoreline derbies were also held. The Hooked on Tradition: Youth Fishing Derby and Outreach Fair took place August 16 at Micro Beach, Saipan, with educational exhibits on marine life, fishing traditions and ocean safety. The event was hosted by DFW, the National Park Service and ISLA. The CNMI Office of Youth Affairs held a Youth Shoreline Fishing Workshop and Derby August 23–24, featuring classroom sessions on boating safety, resource management and fishing techniques, followed by a shoreline derby from Micro Beach to Oleai Beach Bar and Grill. Forty youth participated across rod-and-reel and cast-net categories. The quarter concluded with the 3rd Annual Elijah Craig Bourbon Billfish Jackpot Tournament September 13, hosted by SFA. The winning marlin weighed 255 pounds, edging the runner-up by one pound. The event was dedicated to former Lt. Gov. and long-time SFA member Diego Benavente, for whom the tournament has been renamed the Diego Benavente Classic Billfish Tournament in recognition of his decades of service to the CNMI fishing community.

Itibus reported on governmental updates in the CNMI. The CNMI Public School System is facing a major budget shortfall for fiscal year 2025–2026. While the Public School System

requested approximately \$49.3 million, the House of Representatives approved \$31.7 million — nearly \$18 million less than requested. The deficit may result in reduced instructional days, staff furloughs and potential school consolidations. The Board of Education indicated a willingness to operate under a \$40 million budget, consistent with the constitutional requirement that 25% of local revenues support education. In response, students, parents and educators have organized demonstrations and met with legislators to advocate for adequate funding. Ensuring access to quality education remains essential to developing future leaders and stewards of the CNMI's natural and marine resources. Delegate Kimberlyn King-Hinds confirmed the restoration of airmail service from the CNMI to the U.S. mainland following disruptions caused by EO 14324, which suspended the de minimis exemption for low-value imports. The United States Postal Service partnered with a third-party provider approved by U.S. Customs and Border Protection to ensure compliance, allowing mail and packages from the CNMI and Guam to resume normal transport to the mainland. All mail and packages from Guam and the CNMI were successfully transported to Honolulu Sept. 9, 2025, marking the full restoration of service. Reliable airmail is critical to the CNMI fishing community, supporting communication, trade, and timely shipment of seafood products, documentation and supplies essential for fisheries operations and compliance. The Hotel Association of the Northern Mariana Islands reported an average occupancy rate of 39% in July 2025, down from 45% in July 2024. The decline follows reduced air service from key markets, particularly Korea, and the suspension of the EVS-TAP visa program for visitors from Hong Kong. The downturn has affected tourism-related sectors, including fisheries tourism, sportfishing charters and local seafood markets. Tourism remains an important component of the CNMI economy and a source of support for the fishing community. Sustained visitor activity contributes to investments in equipment, conservation and programs that promote responsible fisheries management.

Itibus announced that the Council recognized the passing of Gov. Palacios, whose leadership and long-standing partnership with the Council strengthened fisheries management and ocean stewardship in the CNMI. His contributions will have a lasting impact on the Commonwealth's resource management efforts. Itibus acknowledged that the Council welcomes Gov. Dave Apatang and Lt. Gov. Dennis Mendiola and looks forward to continued collaboration with the new administration to advance sustainable fisheries and marine resource initiatives in the CNMI.

2. Department of Lands and Natural Resources/Division of Fish and Wildlife Report

Michael Tenorio presented an overview of the CNMI DFW's Fishery-Dependent Data Collection Program, highlighting three main components: the boat-based creel survey, the commercial purchase reporting system and the shore-based creel survey. During the reporting period, the boat-based creel survey completed nine surveys and 20 interviews, consisting of 12 trolling, three bottomfishing and two spearfishing trips. The commercial purchase reporting system collected 183 receipts from nine vendors, while the shore-based creel survey conducted 20 surveys and 50 interviews, including 45 hook-and-line fishers, three cast-net fishers and two spearfishers. Contracts were completed for the deployment of two FADs (DD and EE) around Rota, with deployment planned before the end of the year, weather permitting. Two FADs were also deployed around Saipan in March, though one was lost to bad weather and will be replaced next year. Plans are underway to install a "smart" FAD west of Tinian to provide real-time data on fish presence beneath the device, as well as to deploy additional devices around Saipan and Tinian in the coming year. For the Life History Program, sampling continued for parrotfish, rabbitfish and shallow bottomfish species. Approximately 150 otoliths were processed and aged, and 160 gonad samples were staged for sexual maturity analysis. Preparations are being made to

begin embedding and sectioning gonads in-house, providing hands-on training opportunities for Northern Marianas College interns. Under the Coral Reef Management Program, hardware and software for photo analysis were recently received and assembled, with staff conducting practice image collections using new cameras. Future plans include conducting a proper structure from motion survey, deploying baited remote underwater video (BRUV) systems and expanding survey efforts to Rota. In the Tagging Project, activities were conducted opportunistically within and outside the Saipan lagoon, collecting species, length and weight data before fish were released. More than 100 fish were tagged using surround nets across three events, primarily capturing juveniles, while hook-and-line methods captured larger species. No recaptures have been recorded yet, but ongoing outreach aims to improve reporting. The team has conducted outreach at fishing derbies, interviews with NMI News Service, and distributed informational flyers to tackle shops and fish vendors. Future plans include incorporating acoustic tagging to track fish movements in the lagoon.

The Fishery Independent Survey and Habitat Assessment Program, which collects data on abundance and diversity of coral reef species reported 17 surveys were conducted along Saipan's west reefs, and an additional 28 surveys were completed during the NOAA Fisheries Ecosystem Sciences Division cruise across the CNMI and Guam. The team is finalizing technical reports from previous surveys and processing benthic photos, with plans to engage Northern Marianas College interns for assistance. Upcoming work includes completing remaining Saipan sites, conducting Rota surveys and deploying BRUV systems. Under the Boating Access Program, routine ground maintenance continues at Tinian's boat ramp and marina facilities, with signage and parking stalls recently added. Federal Emergency Management Agency representatives conducted a damage assessment at the Tinian Marina, and the rehabilitation contract is awaiting a notice to proceed. For Rota, the program manager is pursuing permits for the West Harbor Marina Rehabilitation Project, with a Division of Coastal Resource Management conditional permit secured and a waiver of water quality certification pending. Repairs to the Rota dock were completed in March and it has since had heavy use.

In Saipan, operations and maintenance on the Smiling Cove Marina are ongoing. Staff removed debris following storm events, and a maintenance dredging feasibility study contract was finalized pending the notice to proceed. Meetings with the Army Corps of Engineers, National Park Service and local agencies were held to address dredging scope and erosion issues around the American Memorial Park area. The Enforcement Program officers conduct at-sea patrols to monitor fishing activities, ensure compliance with fisheries regulations and protect endangered species habitats. Joint patrols with OLE focus on monitoring ESA and MMPA-related activities. Outreach activities were conducted at community and youth events, reaching between 50 and 200 participants per event. Enforcement officers also continue to issue fishing and research permits, inspect vendors and restaurants for compliance, and educate fishers on reporting and gear regulations. During turtle nesting season, officers assist the Green Sea Turtle Program by patrolling nesting sites and supporting conservation efforts.

Igisomar inquired about the progress on the CNMI's FMP.

Tenorio responded that work on the FMP had recently intensified, with approximately 45% of the document completed. He noted that additional assistance from external sources was being considered to help advance the project.

Igisomar acknowledged the request for support from NMFS partners, emphasizing that staff is federally funded through grants and have limited capacity to take on tasks beyond their current assignments. He then reflected on recent challenges facing the CNMI, including the

deaths of former Gov. Palacios, AP member Mike Fleming and his own uncle, who had taught him traditional fishing and ocean stewardship practices. He highlighted how these losses underscore the importance of policies supporting cultural and traditional practices, noting that further discussion on serious actions regarding cultural and traditional take will be necessary.

3. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Bottomfish Management Unit Species Annual Catch Limit Specification (Initial Action)

Angela Dela Cruz, Council staff, presented on the CNMI BMUS ACL specification. During the 156th SSC Meeting held in June 2025, PIFSC provided an update on the bottomfish stock assessment and best scientific information available (BSIA) determination. During the 203rd Council Meeting in June 2025, the Council reviewed the CNMI bottomfish stock assessment, endorsed the SSC's BSIA determination, and directed staff to develop management options based on the assessment results.

The 2025 stock assessment, recognized as BSIA, confirmed that the CNMI bottomfish stock remains healthy and is not experiencing overfishing. The MSY decreased from 93,600 pounds, as determined in the 2019 benchmark assessment, to 82,500 pounds, primarily due to updated model parameters and the inclusion of six additional years of data (2018–2023). The 2023 harvest rate was approximately 3%, well below the harvest rate at MSY of approximately 15%, indicating that fishing pressure remains low. The estimated biomass for 2023 was 463,800 pounds, roughly 92% of the biomass at MSY (550,000 pounds), signifying that the stock is within a sustainable range. Overall, stock projections show a 66% probability that the stock is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing, with only a 10% probability of both occurring concurrently.

Overall, the 2025 stock assessment indicates that the CNMI bottomfish fishery remains biologically sustainable. Catch levels continue to fall well below allowable limits, and management measures are now aligned with the most recent scientific data and regulatory requirements, supporting long-term sustainability of the fishery. The assessment incorporated several reductions to account for management and monitoring uncertainty (P*), including a 3.3% adjustment for unreported catch, 2.5% for process error and 4.2% for productivity and susceptibility. No reductions were applied under the social, economic or ecological dimensions, while a 5% reduction was applied for management and monitoring uncertainty. At the 157th SSC Meeting in September 2025, the committee recommended setting the acceptable biological catch (ABC) at 72,000 pounds. Based on these findings, four management options were considered for the 2026–2029 fishing years. Option 1 proposed taking no action and not specifying an ACL. Option 2 maintained the status quo with an ACL of 82,000 pounds and an annual catch target (ACT) of 75,000 pounds, based on the previous 2019 assessment. Option 3 would specify an ACL equal to ABC at 72,000 pounds and an ACT of 66,000 pounds, reflecting updated 2025 science and maintaining a precautionary approach aligned with recent average catch levels of 44,054 pounds between 2021 and 2023. Option 4 proposed a more conservative ACL and ACT set lower than the P* and SEEM recommendations, providing an added safeguard against uncertainty with minimal expected impact on fishery operations.

Weaver inquired whether option 3 or option 4 could be amended in the future should an investor express interest in establishing a fishing company.

Dela Cruz clarified that if an overage occurs in a given year, the excess amount would be subtracted from the allowable catch in the following year.

Zach Yamada, Council staff, said under the accountability measures, if the fishery exceeds the ACL in two years within the specified period, the issue must be brought back to the Council for further review. Depending on the findings, the Council may recommend that PIFSC conduct an updated stock assessment to reassess fishery performance. He noted that this process creates a “trickle effect,” allowing management actions to adjust based on how the fishery performs over time.

C. Advisory Group Report and Recommendations

1. Mariana Archipelago Advisory Panel

Dela Cruz presented the AP recommendations on behalf of the CNMI vice chair.

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

Regarding the CNMI bottomfish ACL specifications, the CNMI AP recommends the Council take initial action on option 3 to specify ACLs, ACTs and accountability measures for 2026-2029, utilizing the results of the P* and SEEM analysis based on the 2025 stock assessment update.

2. Fishing Industry Advisory Committee

There were no FIAC recommendations for the Mariana Archipelago.

3. Scientific and Statistical Committee

Helyer, SSC member, presented the SSC recommendations.

Regarding setting ABC for the CNMI bottomfish fishery, the SSC recommends option 3: set ABC based on revised P* and 2025 stock assessment update.

D. Public Comment

Manny Dueñas from Guam raised several concerns regarding fisheries management and coastal resource impacts. He said the effects of the military buildup and associated coastal development, including extensive infrastructure, are not currently addressed in the FEP, and he stressed that the FEP should be completed before a FMP is developed to define the scope of fisheries governance. He also said fisheries are often blamed for resource depletion, size limits, licensing and registry issues. Traditional fishing practices, such as *sulu* — night fishing in lagoons and within reefs — are being overlooked. He said he supports banning gillnets and noted that there is no National Standard guiding FMP development, underscoring the need for clear procedural guidelines. He said infrastructure challenges, including the long-standing volunteer effort by the Guam Fishermen’s Cooperative Association to provide water and sewer services at pump-out stations, which remain underutilized due to USCG regulations, are resulting in improper waste disposal. He also said funding is needed for the Council to better understand the impact of military activities, to deploy FADs near the surface danger zone, and construct a military-funded boat ramp on the east side of the island. He said all existing ramps are on the west side and within military firing range areas, raising safety and accessibility concerns.

Audrey Toves, AP member for Guam and owner of One Love Gud Vibes Charters,

commented on her recent experience aboard the *Oscar Elton Sette*. She said she was the only fisher from Guam selected to participate, along with two fishers from Saipan, Lino Tenorio and James Roberto. During the trip, she said she engaged in biosampling, life history studies and data collection to support stock assessments for the CNMI. She said she appreciated the opportunity to work with NOAA scientists, including Ben Richards and Eva Schemmel, and highlighted the hands-on experience she gained in sampling otoliths, gonads and eyes to study fish health and environmental exposure. She said fish in the Northern Islands were larger and healthier, with high levels of shark depredation, emphasizing the value of these uncharted fishing grounds. All catch from the trip was returned to the community. She said it is important to mentor the next generation, noting that her son, Izzic Cabrera, participated in the Council's vocational program, and underscored the need to preserve cultural practices and traditional fishing knowledge in Guam, where language and traditions are at risk of being lost. She said there was a need for increased funding to continue these programs and was optimistic about the future of fisheries and cultural stewardship in the region.

E. Council Discussion and Action

Regarding the CNMI bottomfish ACL specifications, the Council:

- 1. Selected option 3 as the preliminary preferred alternative, that would specify a CNMI bottomfish ACL of 72,000 pounds with an ACT of 66,000 pounds for the fishing years 2026-2029. Further, the Council directed staff to work with the Action Team to finalize the supporting analysis for the ACL specification for final action at the December 2025 meeting.**

Moved by Rosario, seconded by Itibus.
Motion passed.

Regarding CNMI fishery issues, the Council:

- 2. Directed Council staff to work with DFW to provide education and outreach to the commercial fishermen and vendors on the importance of mandatory licensing and reporting to better monitor and understand CNMI's commercial and noncommercial fishery performance.**

[The original motion included a second part (motion #3) to request NMFS PIRO hire a contractor to assist the CNMI in the completion of its FMP. Malloy clarified that a contractor had already been hired in August, and thus this part of the motion was withdrawn by unanimous consent. Jarad Makaiau, PIRO, provided additional information indicating that Fish Bank was contracted to assist the CNMI in the development of its territorial fishery management and that Steve McKagan is the CNMI point of contact for the contract.]

Moved by Igisomar, seconded by Itibus.
Motion passed.

X. Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items

There was no request for public comment on non-agenda items.

XI. Pelagics and International

A. Status of Electronic Monitoring Implementation and Development of Vessel Monitoring Plans

Fitchett, Council staff, provided an overview of the Council's previous decision on EM, status of implementation and the need for development of vessel monitoring plans (VMPs) for executing the EM program. The Council took final action in June 2025 to implement EM in both the Hawai'i and American Samoa longline fisheries. EM will be implemented as a monitoring mechanism for Western Pacific longline fisheries with limited-entry permits, specifically large vessels (Class C and D over 50 feet) with American Samoa limited-entry permits and all longline vessels with a Hawai'i limited-entry permit. The primary objective is at-sea monitoring and data collection to provide reliable estimates of protected species interactions and for other lawful purposes. Vessels must carry NMFS-certified EM systems and maintain a VMP onboard, detailing crew responsibilities and contact information. The Council recommended including a process to revise VMP requirements if changes occur due to system obsolescence or fishing configuration changes. Exemptions are available if a malfunction occurs and appropriate notification is provided. Implementation will be phased in with random selection of eligible vessels between 2025 and 2027. The Council also recommended that EM be fully funded by the agency (both administrative and sampling costs) to reduce the burden on the fishery, particularly in American Samoa, as the monitoring is for protected species under the ESA and MMPA. If NMFS funding is unavailable, monitoring alternatives must be reviewed.

At the time of final action, Council also directed staff to conduct VMP workshops with industry and NMFS to ensure the plans are practical and appropriate and do not overburden fishers at sea. Tentative VMP workshop dates are the weeks of October 14 and October 20, 2025. The Council also requested NMFS to conduct EM 101 outreach, ideally every two years alongside procedural crew training.

Regarding the implementation timeline, PSMFC will open a request for proposals for potential vendors in early October. The target date for proposed rulemaking is January 2026, with a decision on appropriate EM vendors also expected during that month. The target date for the rulemaking to be in place is April 2026, with the first phase of Hawai'i vessel installations toward the end of the first quarter in 2026. Currently 20 vessels are voluntarily participating in EM and steps are being taken to ensure they are upgraded and can be used to contribute to data collection in the interim until rulemaking and implementation are finalized. American Samoa would expect phasing in of EM in 2027 with the possibility of scoping in late 2026.

PSMFC is responsible for data storage, hardware procurement and installations. Since Hawai'i is a recent member of the PSMFC, the commission can serve as the technical body for EM. PIFSC is the science provider, handling catch interaction estimation. PIRO is responsible for promulgating regulations and ensuring operational compliance.

The draft VMP template includes components on at-sea, pre-trip and post-sea responsibilities, as well as contingencies for malfunctions. Fitchett provided an overview of each of these components and associated discussion from a coordination meeting held in July 2025 and input to date from fishing industry and Council advisory bodies.

At-sea responsibilities include operators making sure the cameras are operational and clear using the viewfinder on the EM system. Lenses need to be cleaned or wiped off before each haul. Operators are responsible for ensuring that debris, salt spray or caked-on material is wiped off the lens before hauling. Crew must follow catch handling requirements provided under other regulations. Vessel operators should not move or reconfigure the cameras because this is the

responsibility of the installation technician. The system placement must be practical so that crew do not have to climb to maintain them, which is a safety concern at sea.

Pre-trip requirements include ensuring the EM system is ready before the vessel leaves port. The 72-hour notification prior to trip departure provides a buffer in case there are issues with the systems. Vessel operators are responsible for ensuring the power is on and confirming hard drive space is adequate. Operators need to maintain an uninterrupted power supply. They must perform a function test, which involves ensuring the system is on, the cameras are functional and the viewfinder is working.

EM systems typically use hard drives, but there has been discussion regarding the feasibility of transmitting data remotely instead, especially now that many vessels have Starlink and docks have Wi-Fi. However, remote transmission poses problems related to transmission time and the reliability of Wi-Fi, and using the hard drive system seems to be the more feasible and simpler mechanism. To minimize the burden on fishers, PSMFC indicated it would provide and retrieve the hard drives at the pier, eliminating the need for mailing. PSMFC is responsible for ensuring hard drives are available. A key discussion point for American Samoa specifically concerned who would pick up the hard drives locally and provide replacements. NMFS does have a staff member in Pago Pago willing to assist, and PSMFC indicated it could provide added capacity if needed. PSMFC also indicated a willingness to retrieve hard drives from the system itself if fishers face issues with the simple "press, click and remove" process.

Post-trip requirements include providing hard drives and reporting malfunctions. The hard drive must be provided within three days of the trip ending. If the EM system experiences a critical malfunction, fishers must report it as soon as possible. If the malfunction is not resolved within 72 hours after returning to port, the vessel may be required to carry a human observer or may be provided with an exemption by the regional administrator, consistent with the Council's recommendation.

Ilaoa asked if PIRO already has staff members in Pago Pago and whether they would be best suited to take care of the hard drive-related tasks.

Malloy said there are two staff members in American Samoa, one for observers and one for habitat.

Fitchett said the task of collecting the hard drives should be simple, not requiring technical expertise.

Jones, PIFSC, said the center lost a staff person in American Samoa who had been working with the two PIRO staff, and PIFSC is now seeking to hire a local replacement. This position would likely be funded through PSMFC to handle EM system servicing and assist with electronic reporting (ER) systems, addressing the capacity needs for longline EM, ER and purse seine fishery issues.

Ilaoa noted the importance of training someone locally in American Samoa to service EM systems, as there are only three flights a week, making it difficult to meet the 72-hour malfunction window. He also strongly discouraged placing any additional costs, especially sampling costs, on the fleet due to severe hardships.

Jones confirmed the plan is to build that expertise locally using PSMFC personnel so service would be constantly available. Jones said PIFSC needs extra capacity with EM and ER.

Feliciano asked how the eventual replacement of EM systems would be handled, given their roughly \$10,000 cost per unit, their three-year lifespan and the current federal funding cuts.

Fitchett said NMFS has secured funding until the end of 2027 for the first phase, but funding beyond 2027 is not guaranteed. Fitchett noted systems are approximately \$10,000 with an average cost of \$3,000 per year, assuming a three-year lifespan.

Malloy reiterated her appreciation for all partners including Council staff, members, PIFSC, PIRO, PSMFC and the fishing industry in this effort, noting that what has been done over the past year has typically taken five or more years to accomplish in other programs. She acknowledged the large amount of work that has gone into the effort and how successful it has been to date, and hoped they can continue on that path.

B. International Fisheries

1. WCPFC Scientific Committee Report

Felipe Carvalho, PIFSC, presented the report from the 21st Regular Session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee (SC21), held in Tonga, Aug. 13-21, 2025. The U.S. delegation covered the four major themes of the meeting: data and statistics, stock assessment, management issues and ecosystem and bycatch.

2024 was a record year for tuna catches in the WCPFC area, primarily fueled by increases in skipjack. However, this did not translate to value universally: the longline fishery value was down 20% to about \$1.1 billion. Purse seine catch, conversely, generated \$3.4 billion with a slight 1% decrease, and skipjack representing 65% to 80% of that total catch. Notably, longline skipjack catch hit a record high of more than 6,000 tons in 2024.

The SC21 reviewed four new stock assessments. The outlook for skipjack remains positive, confirmed as healthy, neither overfished nor subject to overfishing, with current biomass near 98% of the interim target reference point. The Southwest Pacific striped marlin was assessed through a joint SPC/PIFSC model, finding the stock to be overfished, though not currently subject to overfishing; projections suggest it will rebuild to MSY levels by 2026 if catches remain stable. OWT is still a stock of concern, which remains severely depleted, sitting at around 6% of unfished biomass and continuing to be overfished. SPC also presented preliminary genetic evidence suggesting at least three distinct genetic groups exist within the South Pacific albacore stock.

In management issues, SC21 endorsed the continued application of the skipjack management procedure. However, the adoption of the bigeye management procedure was delayed until 2026 due to an incomplete operating model grid, and the review of the tropical tuna measure was postponed until 2027. Significant discussion occurred regarding the South Pacific albacore management procedure, with the United States successfully pressing for two harvest control rules optimal for American Samoa despite pushback from China. Regarding data and monitoring, the U.S. proposals for an informal working group on sea turtles and a proposal for a unified monitoring CMM combining the Regional Observer Program (ROP) and EM were advanced. Ongoing efforts were also directed toward developing and testing biodegradable FADs, with SC21 requesting a specific project to study the longevity of different biodegradable materials at deep depths to report back next year.

Muña asked for more details on biodegradable FAD options, specifically concerning their longevity and survivability when deployed at deep depths (more than 1,000 fathoms).

Emily Crigler, PIFSC and WCPFC Science Committee chair, said the SC21 requested additional work and plans to develop a project specifically looking at the longevity of different biodegradable FAD materials to report back next year, as the answer is not yet known.

Muña asked what biodegradable materials are considered.

Crigler said some type of rope is being used but did not have details on hand, but offered to follow up with more information.

Muña asked Carvalho to send over information to Michael Dueñas on her staff.

Carvalho acknowledged this request and stated he would contact Dueñas.

Sword noted that the American Samoa industry uses bamboo FADs and still sees persistent debris resulting from usage. He said agencies need to fund research on effective biodegradable materials like cotton or manila rope, otherwise the problem of persistent marine debris will not be solved.

2. Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission Technical Compliance Committee Report

Kahl, PIRO and the head of U.S. delegation to the WCPFC Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC), provided an update on the TCC meeting scheduled for the week after the Council meeting in Pohnpei, Micronesia. The U.S. delegation to the TCC includes Ryan and Goldman, and it will be participating in the compliance review to defend U.S. interests and address other nations' compliance. Leslie Hahn, PIRO, will also join the delegation to help advance the EM working group for the WCPFC. The meeting structure includes two intersessional working groups on FAD management options and the ROP the day before the TCC. Biodegradability will be a key issue in the FAD intersessional working group, with natural materials like hemp and cotton considered biodegradable, and the United States noting that the IATTC's recent decision on the matter is driving discussion at the WCPFC. In the ROP intersessional working group, the United States will continue to advance its proposal for a unified monitoring CMM that combines ROP and EM, and the group will also address data standards for transshipment observers, recognizing transshipment as a primary vehicle for IUU fishing. Key issues at the TCC include addressing the IUU fishing list, where the United States is supportive of New Zealand's nominations of Indonesian vessels. The United States will also maintain its strong position to press for compliance monitoring review to be done in the open, like other regional fishery management organizations, instead of in a closed session that reduces accountability for other nations. Kahl stressed that this is a particularly important year for American Samoa, which submitted its first scientific report (Annual Report Part 1) and its first compliance report (Part 2), thus fully participating for the first time as a SIDS. Kahl encouraged the CNMI and Guam to consider deepening their participation, beginning with generating the required annual scientific reporting. Other technical issues include improving the compliance case file system for high seas boarding and inspection and ensuring the enforceability of the shark measure, which Kahl noted remains an uphill battle. The TCC meeting will be followed by the U.S. PAC meeting (October 6-8) and the 22nd Annual WCPFC Meeting in Manila (December 1-5).

Igisomar asked for clarification on what American Samoa's deeper participation means, noting that CNMI and Guam are interested in being more participatory in the WCPFC, including the TCC.

Kahl explained that deeper participation would involve working closely with NMFS to generate the required annual scientific and compliance reports and participating in-person at commission activities, asserting their SIDS status. Kahl offered to support CNMI in outlining territory aspirations in a scientific report for next year.

Muña asked for a virtual call after the TCC meeting and before the PAC meeting with members from the CNMI and Guam to discuss the components of the required reporting.

Kahl agreed and invited American Samoa to join the discussion to share lessons learned from its experience.

Domingo Ochavillo, DMWR, said American Samoa's full participation and recognition as a SIDS has been a long time coming. He thanked the PIFSC and PIRO for the support that allowed American Samoa to submit the annual reports for the first time, noting this was key to achieving SIDS recognition.

Igisomar asked if the U.S. delegation planned to submit a delegation paper to support the SIDS efforts of the territories.

Kahl said the SIDS status of the territories is not in question from the perspective of the United States. He explained that American Samoa's annual reporting is an assertion of SIDS status through full participation, and therefore, the United States is not going to submit a paper seeking approval or permission for that status.

Ilaoa thanked NMFS for the guidance and the support of Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Drew Lawler for the action to attribute catch from their purse seine vessels to American Samoa, calling it a huge step toward recognizing a local American Samoa purse seine fishery as a SIDS fleet. Ilaoa asked if the United States intends to proceed with domestic rulemaking to finally distinguish the local American Samoa purse seine fishery among U.S.-flagged vessels, as this would help further recognize it as a SIDS fleet.

Kahl said NMFS is proceeding as planned regarding reporting and participation, but deferred the domestic implementation and rulemaking discussion to the regional administrator.

Malloy said attribution is the first step and there is no immediate driving need for rulemaking right now because the fleet is under the total allocation, so there is no compliance concern with WCPFC requirements. However, she confirmed NMFS is considering the need for rulemaking in the future. She encouraged the territories to bring their forward-looking aspirations and desires for positioning the territories to take advantage of WCPFC allocations to the PAC meeting.

Ilaoa urged NMFS to move ahead with the rulemaking.

Simonds advised the territories to review the WCPFC CMMs concerning SIDS and prepare specific requests for the PAC meeting. For example, if the territories wanted to sell quota to other countries, they would pose that question to the United States, which would review if the commission rules allow it, and then consider domestic steps.

Sword asked if there have been any discussions on what the United States intends to do to create incentives to increase the number of boats to meet the EO request for increased seafood competitiveness and expand the ability of the nation to acquire more fish, rather than depending on imports.

Malloy said this is a major interest of Lawler's, who wants to build capacity and interest, and to provide financial incentives to attract more vessels. She did not know exactly where it falls on his priority list.

Sword suggested that addressing this would require a task force approach involving the USCG and shipyards to solve problems like obtaining masters and crew, thus increasing U.S. capacity to fish in the Pacific.

Igisomar followed up on the SIDS categorization, asking if there are federal regulations that territories may be exempt from because they are recognized as developing states, to help foster development. He stressed that identifying such exemptions and policy overlaps would be beneficial to creating enticing offers for potential fishers.

Muña asked if these conversations could be held before the PAC meeting to ensure U.S. State Department support for moving forward with interested parties.

Ryan said the U.S. State Department would appreciate being included in these conversations. She reiterated that the head of the delegation sets the policy, and treating the territories as SIDS is the position, with no paper being submitted to that effect.

Simonds emphasized the importance of the new administration following Public Law 14-327, Ensuring Access to Pacific Fisheries Act, enacted in 2016. This law requires that U.S. positions must optimize American fishing access, not disadvantage domestic vessels relative to other nations, consider traditional fishing areas and not cede U.S. fishing capacity to foreign fisheries. She stated this needed to be on record because positions taken by previous administrations had disadvantaged U.S. fisheries.

Sword concurred with Simonds, stating that in the last two decades, the territories have lost ground because heads of delegation at WCPFC meetings failed to consult them, resulting in decisions that negatively impacted their fisheries, especially American Samoa. He urged the federal partners to adopt an "America First" strategy, ensuring that U.S. interests are not placed second to everyone else in the world, and that the head of delegation is clear on positions before entering negotiations, preventing last-minute changes.

Ilaoa reiterated that the serious decline of the local longline fleet was caused by the unilateral removal of American Samoa's ability to transfer a portion of its bigeye tuna quota to Hawai'i longline fishers. He explained that this quota transfer funding made up almost all the development money for the fisheries, and now it is gone. He stressed the need to support the longline fleet, as its MSC certification is vital for the cannery to fulfill contracts that provide food for U.S. troops and school lunches across the nation.

Malloy reminded the Council of the existing process for providing input to Lawler as the head of U.S. delegation to the WCPFC through Commissioner Dang as well as through PAC members including Council staff and territorial representatives. She said there is ample opportunity for direct communication. She agreed on the importance of the SFF and noted that

while the money has been transferred, it has not been spent down, offering assistance from NOAA's grants staff in spending those funds in the territories.

Dang thanked everyone for sharing their concerns and pledged to work toward ensuring past mistakes are not repeated.

3. American Samoa Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission Fishery Issues

Fitchett provided an overview of American Samoa's WCPFC fishery issues, starting with a summary of the severe economic deterioration of the longline fleet. Costs increased 40% in 2024 from the previous five years, while the average fish price in Pago Pago declined 26% to an all-time low. WCPFC reports indicated 2024 was the worst year on record for the entire southern Pacific longline fishery targeting albacore in terms of economic performance. To safeguard the fishery's market access, it is important that the WCPFC adopt a management procedure for South Pacific albacore by 2026. Management procedures include a target reference point (i.e., relative stock biomass 2017-2029) and harvest control rule. Management procedures are evaluated based on performance metrics such as catch variability and stability, total catches and vulnerable biomass which is correlated with CPUE for vessels. The management procedure developed to date assumes a baseline catch in waters from 10°S to the equator, where mixed fisheries target multiple tuna stocks, as well as a candidate baseline catch in the eastern Pacific within IATTC waters. Under the adopted management procedure, catch and effort controls would apply in waters south of 10°S within WCPFC jurisdiction. Adoption of the procedure is necessary to retain MSC certification, which secures a premium price of \$200 to \$500 per ton for vessels selling to StarKist, the primary buyer for the American Samoa longline fleet. Candidate allocations and management procedures are expected to be proposed in upcoming meetings.

Kahl reported on the South Pacific Albacore Management Workshop. NMFS has been working closely with American Samoa officials and PIFSC to identify and narrow down harvest control rules to two out of the seven candidates that were deemed optimal for American Samoa. At the workshop, the United States intervention to narrow the options was immediately met with pushback from China, which insisted that all options remain on the table. Due to the advanced stage of development, it is too late to integrate economic factors directly into the current management procedure. Furthermore, the United States reiterated its long-standing position to manage South Pacific albacore from the equator south (0 degrees), successfully resisting proposed exemptions sought by Parties to the Nauru Agreement members for their EEZs between 0 and 10°S. A follow-up WCPFC workshop is scheduled Nov. 5, 2025.

Ochavillo reported American Samoa asserted its status as a SIDS by submitting its first Annual Report Part 1 and attributing purse seine catch based on vessels that landed at least 50% of their catch in the territory, consistent with American Samoa's local legislation. The same attribution will be discussed at the TCC meeting.

Sword asked what pricing structure is used to set the price per pound for American Samoa albacore and whether it is determined using Thailand or South American prices.

Fitchett said prices for local canneries are determined through a global market and based on Bangkok prices.

Feliciano confirmed prices for American Samoa are based on the market prices in Bangkok. However, Bangkok is still getting about \$500 a ton higher than in American Samoa,

even though American Samoa longliners are providing direct deliveries, whereas Bangkok is importing a lot of its albacore.

Sword asked if the analyses presented are using prices from Bangkok.

Fitchett said the analyses referenced for American Samoa were data from the Pago Pago cannery while WCPFC analyses use data from all over the Pacific to provide their economic performance index.

Sword asked if anyone has conducted a price comparison between the WCPFC market and the IATTC market, noting that purse seiners often offload in South America because prices may be higher by \$300-\$400 per ton. American Samoa's prices are based on Bangkok and the cannery takes \$150 per ton off the price as a convenience fee.

Fitchett said he could follow up with SPC staff members regarding the prices they use for their analysis, as well as with NMFS regarding the comparative analysis of American Samoa pricing versus Manta and Bangkok pricing.

Sword said the concern is the viability of the American Samoa fisheries, noting Pago Pago cannery fish provide food for the military and U.S. markets. The same disconnect with U.S. producers and foreign pricing structure was noticed in the petroleum industry. Sword provided parallels between the U.S. petroleum industry in the past with reduced domestic production. He urged a study to figure out how to help the American Samoa fleet remain viable.

Ilaoa said he would take advantage of the opportunities to work with NMFS to implement the outstanding projects under the SFF. However, the crux of the issue is the fact that the territories were stripped of their main fishery development funds without having a say in the matter. This issue was compounded with the lack of voice regarding marine national monuments in the Pacific, and Ilaoa said the territories are good Americans who send their sons to the military and NFL, and they deserve a voice. Ilaoa asked if NMFS has plans to renegotiate the tropical tuna measure to allow the territorial arrangements (quota transfer provisions) to be put back in place, or if there were other plans for fishery development funds.

Malloy said to her knowledge, NMFS has no immediate plans to renegotiate the tropical tuna measure provision that enabled the territorial arrangements. Malloy encouraged Ilaoa to bring these concerns up and present them to Lawler at the PAC meeting, noting Lawler's philosophy is "America First" and focused on providing economic opportunities for fishing.

Igisomar said while the lines of communication may be open now, that was not the case in the past, recalling instances where territories were told to "fend for themselves" at WCPFC. He said they cannot forget past issues, such as the disappearance of Paragraph 9 in the 2023 tropical tuna measure and the federal government's lack of clarity on what will replace the funding that was lost as a result.

Simonds said the Council should tell the administration to think twice about providing foreign aid to WCPFC members who are accepting the U.S. tuna treaty obligations and instead consider providing some of those funds to the territories for fisheries development.

Ryan clarified that funding for the tuna treaty is foreign assistance and could not go to the territories because it is a different pot of funds.

4. Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission Report

Fitchett presented the IATTC update. The IATTC manages waters east of the 150°W meridian, which covers approximately 15% to 20% of the Hawai‘i longline fishery's catch. The IATTC conducted updated stock assessments and held several key meetings, including the Science Advisory Committee and the General Advisory Committee in July, followed by the IATTC annual meeting. The report included generally positive news regarding stock status. Catches have been at a record high, with skipjack tuna seeing about a 40% increase in total catch over the last five years. The updated stock assessment for bigeye tuna improved the stock status, reducing the probability that fishing mortality associated with MSY had been exceeded to 25%, and showing a very low probability that the limit reference points for the stock being considered overfished were exceeded.

This positive outcome for bigeye tuna was largely attributed to the success of the individual vessel threshold (IVT). The IVT restricted FAD-associated sets by large vessels, which successfully reduced juvenile bigeye tuna fishing mortality, leading to a rapid decline in bigeye catches in purse seine fisheries. The highliner vessels, historically the largest bigeye catchers, have been catching much less. Both skipjack and yellowfin tuna stocks also showed improved stock status, with skipjack found to be "in the green" based on a new risk analysis. As an outcome of the IVT's success, the IATTC reduced the FAD closure period by eight days, bringing it down from 72 days to 64 days. Other key outcomes included the extension of the silky shark measure to 2028 (mandating non-retention and fins attached), and confirmation that the U.S. longline catch limits remain unchanged. However, the U.S. proposal for catch and effort controls for North Pacific albacore was not adopted, and no real progress was made on harvest strategies or the implementation of EM to complement human observers, despite the Science Advisory Subcommittee recommending EM to complement human observers up to 20% monitoring.

C. Update on the Seafood Import Monitoring Program

Alexa Cole, director of the NMFS Office of International Affairs, Trade and Commerce, provided an update on SIMP. The program underwent a comprehensive review starting around October 2023, culminating in an action plan issued in November 2024. The review engaged approximately 7,000 stakeholders, including those in Hawai‘i, with the goal of ensuring that the program is effective and efficient in keeping IUU fish and fish products out of the U.S. market.

SIMP is a shipment-by-shipment import program, primarily for recordkeeping and reporting, and NMFS staff can conduct audits on individual shipment entries and share that information with OLE and partners at the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP). SIMP covers 13 species groups made up of more than 1,100 individual species, comprising about 35% of annual U.S. seafood imports.

Following EO 14276 on seafood competitiveness, NMFS has removed from the action plan the intention to expand SIMP to all species. Expansion will now only happen on a risk basis related to IUU fishing. Internally, NMFS created the Global Seafood Data System, which uses artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to audit shipments based on a risk score instead of randomly. This system allows NMFS to identify shipments that CBP should stop at the border. The Global Seafood Data System is dynamic and can ratchet risk levels up or down for factors such as the product, country of origin or importer. With the system in place, NMFS is considering a program change through rulemaking that would require SIMP data to be provided 72 or 96 hours in advance of entry. Currently, SIMP requires data at the time of entry, which

means products are often already in the market before audits are complete. New data elements may also be added to close transshipment loopholes, which would assist both IUU enforcement and addressing forced labor concerns. NMFS is analyzing historical SIMP data to better understand and map supply chains and identify "hot areas" of concern. The agency continues to work on the draft rulemaking, with a proposed rule expected in 2026 and final rule estimated for 2027. The SIMP action plan is online, and while an updated version is pending to reflect the decision not to expand to all species, the current version is available.

Sword asked if NMFS is collecting any data to evaluate trends on the decline in imports or increase in U.S. production related to recent tariffs and other changes under the current administration.

Cole said while NMFS has a lot of trade data, it is still too early and dynamic to see good trends or provide robust analysis, as changes are occurring even in anticipation of tariffs. NMFS will be looking at that going forward, and her team has conducted more analyses from the publicly available raw trade data available online.

Sword asked if any of those analyses may be available by December, noting concerns that in American Samoa, purse seiners are trending toward offloading in South America rather than the local cannery.

Cole said she would check with the trade team to see when they might have presentation-ready data on trends and circle back to the Council. She noted that situations similar to that of the purse seine fishery are happening a lot in different places around the country, but it is hard to tell if these are temporary changes or long-term shifts in the way businesses are choosing to operate.

Sakoda asked if SIMP could be used to enforce the MMPA import prohibitions in any way.

Cole said SIMP is not the mechanism for MMPA enforcement. However, both programs rely on the same underlying system, which is CBP's Automated Commercial Environment, where all import data are entered. NMFS will be working closely with CBP and its Automated Commercial Environment system to enforce the MMPA requirements.

Ramsey asked if the SIMP action plan available online is the old or new version.

Cole said the old action plan published November 2024 is still on the website, but an updated version is pending due to the removal of the expansion to all species.

Igisomar asked how the territories fit into SIMP, noting that other agencies including USDA conduct inspections.

Cole said SIMP applies to territories the same as any port in the United States, as it is simply a point-of-entry recordkeeping and reporting requirement. Unlike the USDA system, SIMP does not keep products out as its purpose is to gather information for possible future enforcement action under the MSA or Lacey Act if the product was determined to be caught unlawfully.

D. Marine Mammal Protection Act Imports Provision Implementation Update on Comparability Findings

Cole provided an overview of the Comparability Findings under MMPA Imports Provisions, updates and plans for implementation. The import provision has been in the MMPA since the 1970s, but the regulation requiring comparability findings for imports of products on the list of foreign fisheries was put in place around 2015-2016. Countries had a five-year exemption period to provide information and come into compliance, and applications were due Nov. 30, 2021. NMFS extended the deadline for the final comparability findings several times due to a variety of factors. The final comparability findings were published in the *Federal Register* Sept. 2, 2025, after a 10-year process. The findings will officially take effect Jan. 1, 2026.

NMFS made 2,500 individual comparability findings on a fishery-by-fishery basis. The findings were reported on a country-by-country basis for 131 nations, of which 89 nations received full comparability findings. Twelve nations were fully denied from entering fish products into the United States, including four countries that never applied. Thirty-four nations received partial comparability findings with some of their products prohibited from entering the U.S. market. These findings are officially in place for four years, but countries can appeal a denial starting Jan. 1, 2026.

The maximum estimated impact is that the restrictions could affect up to around 15% of the approximately \$25 billion worth of seafood products coming into the United States annually. This is considered a maximum estimate because for some countries, they will have multiple fisheries that capture the same product, and in some cases, NMFS has found one fishery comparable but another fishery with a different gear type not comparable.

Fisheries are characterized as "export" (higher risk of marine mammal interaction, equivalent to Categories I and II for U.S. fisheries) or "exempt" (low risk, equivalent to Category III for U.S. fisheries). Exempt fisheries needed only to demonstrate they had a law or regulation in place prohibiting serious injury or mortality of marine mammals. Export fisheries had a higher bar of having measures in place that are comparable in effectiveness to the United States, including monitoring and mitigation measures. To deal with products that may come from multiple fisheries with different gear types, a certification of admissibility is required from a government official to affirm that the product originated from a comparable fishery rather than a fishery with an import restriction in place. NMFS is currently responding to a lot of questions from countries that did not receive full comparability finding, and also working with CBP so that the correct country and species with the correct harmonized tariff code is in their system before the import restrictions are implemented Jan. 1, 2026.

Sakoda asked if any fisheries that compete with the region's longline or purse seine vessels were determined to be incompatible.

Cole said the longline fisheries from most of the distant-water fishing nations in the Western and Central Pacific were found to be compatible.

Ramsey sought clarification on the statement regarding 15% impact to trade.

Cole clarified that the 15% referred to the maximum amount of trade coming into the United States that could potentially be impacted.

Dang asked if there is a link to Table 3 on the value of seafood that may be impacted as referenced in the NMFS decision memo for the MMPA comparability findings. He said he is

trying to determine the value for the species that the Hawai'i longline fishery produces and the possible impacts and benefits for American producers.

Cole acknowledged that the links to the tables referenced in the decision memo are currently not available online and that NMFS will need to make those available. She noted that the referenced tables do not show any domestic statistics, but rather the value of the imports from those countries. She added that the tables reflect raw data on the value of imports because there is inconsistency in the level of granularity for data related to the trade tables and harmonized tariff codes. For example, some of them are listed as fish, whereas others may be listed as fish whole, fish frozen or fish fillet. As a result, the estimates in the tables are rather rough estimates in terms of NMFS's ability to estimate the impact of what the agency thinks the trade impact will be. NMFS does not yet have enough information to estimate what the positive and negative impacts will be on some domestic industries. Cole said the agency would be interested in understanding that issue but noted that the program's goal is to identify fisheries that are not held to the same standards and do not operate under the same laws and regulations as U.S. fisheries.

Dang acknowledged the confusing nature of the tariff schedule for all imports coming into the United States, noting that the granularity required in the reporting from exporting countries could mean that the system may not pick up the product from being blocked. He expressed particular concern with frozen tuna cubes and frozen tuna loins, which are highly adulterated in the package such that the coding to be submitted to the CBP system is confusing and could potentially get through without being detected by the comparability finding authorization. Dang also noted that the longline fisheries that the U.S. fisheries compete with do not have the same mitigation measures as the Hawai'i fleet, and asked what the tolerance point for the comparability findings is and how it is possible that their products are allowed to come into the United States if they do not fish the same way that the Hawai'i fleet does.

Cole said the program was set up so that it is not a one and done, but rather after the first comparability finding, countries are required to provide a progress report two years later, and NMFS would do a new comparability finding another two years after. Cole acknowledged that the first round of comparability finding took a long time and was a much harder job than what NMFS fully understood at the beginning, and that the agency may need to rethink how the program is structured. Nonetheless, the first comparability finding was established to set a baseline for all 2,500 fisheries to determine whether these fisheries have laws and regulations on the books that would be comparable in effectiveness to the United States. However, it does not get to the second half of the question of whether those laws are being implemented, monitored and enforced. Cole acknowledged the reality that there will be fisheries that are compatible because they have laws on the books or regulations, permit conditions, mitigation plans or monitoring plans in place, but the ultimate result is not the same as those in the United States.

Dang asked if there is a dead stop, noting that an import ban on products is the only way to get compliance. He noted concerns that countries in Southeast Asia could easily forge documents with support from their government and could be in compliance without being audited, allowing them extra time to infiltrate the U.S. market. Dang also asked if there is a mechanism for industry representatives who are on the front lines of where the products hit the market to report what they are seeing after the import ban kicks in after January 1. He asked how NMFS would follow up with that type of reporting and investigate to ensure that products are not leaking through the system.

Cole acknowledged the possibility that some countries may certify products inappropriately, and that would be something NMFS will have to monitor. Any information that

anyone has would be helpful for NMFS, OLE and CBP so they can coordinate better to identify shipments, countries and products of concern. Any potential violations could be reported through the general OLE hotline, but NMFS currently does not have any hotline for this purpose and could consider setting up an email address. In the near term, Cole said reports of potential inconsistencies with the comparability findings can be sent to her and she would make sure that the appropriate people receive it.

E. Advisory Group Report and Recommendations

1. Advisory Panels

There were no AP recommendations for Pelagics and International.

2. Fishing Industry Advisory Committee

Goto presented the FIAC recommendations.

Regarding MMPA Import Provisions Comparability Findings, the FIAC recommends that the Council request NMFS evaluate the amount of tuna imports affected by the MMPA Import Provisions Comparability Findings Report through the harmonized tariff codes in the report.

3. Scientific and Statistical Committee

Helyer presented the SSC report and recommendations. The SSC received a full presentation on the OWT assessment. In discussion, the committee suggested evaluating hyperstability given emphasis on CPUE. The SSC also suggested continued efforts to require longline fishermen to haul sharks close to the vessel to facilitate species level ID useful for stock assessment and to cut the leader close to the hook to minimize trailing gear, thus improving post-release condition. The SSC also noted that the stock assessment assumes a single Western and Central Pacific Ocean stock, which would not inform sub-regional management, and made the following recommendation:

Regarding the OWT stock assessment, the SSC recommends that the Council work with the U.S. delegation to include spatial stratification as a condition of the next OWT stock assessment.

F. Public Comment

Eric Kingma, Hawaii Longline Association, provided comments on the implementation of the MMPA Import Provisions. He expressed concern that after reading the *Federal Register* notice, the findings do not seem consistent and accurate. He acknowledged the implementation efforts by NMFS but highlighted a disparity between U.S. standards and those applied to foreign fisheries. Kingma said the U.S. pelagic longline fisheries for tuna in Hawai'i and the Atlantic, which are classified as Category I fisheries, are subject to take reduction teams, mitigation measures and requirements to get interactions below the potential biological removal. The MMPA requires the United States to ban imports of commercial fish products caught using technology that results in the incidental kill or incidental serious injury of ocean mammals in excess of U.S. standards. Kingma pointed out that in the U.S. fishery, leaving a hook in a FKW constitutes a serious injury, and said it is absolutely inaccurate that foreign distant-water longline fisheries operating around Hawai'i in the same fishing grounds are removing hooks from FKWs and not causing serious injury. The process seemed rushed due to a court-issued Sept. 1, 2025,

deadline arising from a lawsuit. Kingma said he hopes the Council can recommend that the DOC and NOAA conduct more work to address these issues with the MMPA Import Provision, especially for pelagic longline fishing for tuna and tuna-like species. The MMPA clearly requires foreign standards to be as effective as U.S. standards in reducing and eliminating marine mammal interactions that result in serious injury. He said other countries are not establishing potential biological removals for marine mammal populations the way the United States does.

G. Council Discussion and Action

Regarding U.S. positions in Pacific international fisheries, the Council:

- 1. Requested the principal deputy assistant secretary for International Fisheries ensure that U.S. positions on all issues follow provisions of the Ensuring Access to Fisheries Act.**
- 2. Requested NOAA and the U.S. State Department make fishery development funds for the U.S. Pacific Territories a high priority.**

Moved by Ilaoa, seconded by Rosario.

Motion passed with Malloy abstaining.

Regarding implementation of EM, the Council:

- 3. Requested PSMFC and NMFS to contract a person in American Samoa locally to install/remove EM system hard drives and to provide servicing of EM systems when needed.**

Moved by Weaver, seconded by Ilaoa.

Motion passed.

Regarding MMPA Import Provisions Comparability Findings, the Council:

- 4. Requested NMFS evaluate the amount of tuna imports affected by the MMPA Import Provisions Comparability Findings Report through the harmonized tariff codes in the report.**
- 5. Requested NMFS provide a mechanism for stakeholders and the public to identify any inconsistencies with MMPA Import Provisions Comparability Findings.**
- 6. Requested that NMFS increase the rigor of standards for the MMPA Import Provisions Comparability Findings.**

Moved by Weaver, seconded by Feliciano.

Motion passed.

Regarding WCPFC fishery issues, the Council:

- 7. Requested the United States to work toward ensuring that a management procedure for South Pacific albacore is adopted at the next WCPFC meeting, with a target reference point that controls total catch and that can lead to improved economic conditions for the American Samoa longline fishery.**
- 8. Requested NMFS to liaise with territorial agency leads before the December 2025 WCPFC meeting with the purpose of reviewing current issues and processes for**

territories to take full advantage of their status as a SIDS and Participating Territories within the WCPFC.

- 9. Requested the United States to continue working with American Samoa to attribute catch of purse seine vessels identified by American Samoa as integral to its local tuna economy, and to consider domestic rulemaking if needed to distinguish U.S. Pacific territorial purse seine fisheries.**
- 10. Requested NMFS and the SPC to provide an analysis of pricing structure of cannery markets in American Samoa compared to those in Bangkok and Manta, or other markets.**
- 11. Requested the United States, at the WCPFC subsidiary meetings, work to ensure that spatial stratification is included as a condition for the next OWT stock assessment.**

*Moved by Ilaoa, seconded by Feliciano.
Motion passed.*

XII. American Samoa Archipelago

A. Motu Lipoti

Sword reported the main community concern was the increased presence of bull sharks in Pago Pago Harbor. He said two years earlier a 900-pound, 12-foot bull shark was removed near the ship railway, and that a diver working beneath fishing vessels had been attacked, suffering a severe leg injury. Shark sightings have become frequent near the marina and residents no longer allow children to swim behind the marketplace in Fagatogo. If the trend continues, there will be safety risks from sharks as the territory already averages around seven drownings a year, half involving children who never learned to swim. Similar concerns were raised during the recent Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee (REAC) meeting in Manu'a, where residents also reported increased shark activity. During a recent six-hour trolling trip on the East Bank, he unexpectedly caught two gray sharks weighing approximately 100 pounds each — something he had never experienced before in American Samoa. He also said StarKist Samoa continues to face difficulties as many purse-seine vessels seek better prices overseas, particularly in Panama. The cannery has been forced to import smaller skipjack tuna — three- to five-pound fish — to maintain production. To sustain operations, the cannery plans to restart a pet-food production line using residual fish parts not suitable for canning. The company had attempted this previously but discontinued it, and hopes the renewed effort will help maintain employment.

Congresswoman Amata Radewagen continues securing federal funds and has been a strong advocate for an increased USCG presence in American Samoa, including potential home-porting under the new Oceania District. He said the Council met with Captain Nick Worst, the new captain of the port, to discuss emergency preparedness, vessel manning and response limitations, and master-certification training. He said the fleet suffers from “loss of institutional knowledge” as senior captains retire, and emphasized the need to train the next generation of fishermen. Although American Samoa’s minimum wage is low compared with the mainland, recruitment of local fishers remains difficult. The territory relies on foreign crews, facilitated by its own immigration laws rather than U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services rules, yet staffing vessels remains a challenge. The Port Administration received a federal highways grant to build new ferry facilities in Manu'a and to acquire a replacement ferry. He said American

Rescue Plan Act of 2021 funds are supporting a \$28 million seaport-building project, while the existing M/V *Manu'atele* vessel continues service until a new ferry is delivered. The shipyard had requested, but was denied, a tax exemption by the territorial government. Because of the shortage of purse seiners and local longliners, the yard now depends on contracts from Samoa and Tonga and on specialized repair work for the American Samoa Power Authority. Deep-sea mining issues were discussed extensively during recent REAC meetings. He said the community is divided — some leaders have written letters to the secretary of commerce opposing mining, while others view it as a potential second economic driver. The technology works 18,000 feet under the ocean and may have minimal impact on the water column, but emphasized that open dialogue is essential. The potential mining area lies east of *Muliava* (Rose Atoll) within the zone identified by BOEM. A public hearing hosted by the governor at the Lee Auditorium was intended for outreach, though one staff presentation mistakenly displayed “Vote No Against It.” Impossible Metals presented its proposal at the REAC meeting, improving public understanding. He also said IRA meetings were held on Tutuila, Ta'ū, Olosega, and Manu'a, providing valuable discussions with community leaders — mostly elders, retirees and youth.

Feliciano provided the longline update. He said the American Samoa longline fleet continues to face significant challenges, with only six vessels currently active compared to nine last year. High operational costs, particularly fuel and maintenance, have made continued operation unfeasible for some to operate. Albacore catches for the first half of the year were lower compared to 2024, while yellowfin tuna landings were slightly higher but have since declined in recent weeks. A bait shortage has compounded the fleet's operational challenges, further reducing efficiency and profitability. Despite these difficulties, he said the fleet continues to operate whenever possible. Positive developments for the fleet included discussions to strengthen partnerships between the fleet and StarKist Samoa to maintain deliveries of U.S.-flagged albacore and identify mutual support opportunities. He said StarKist agreed to import and supply bait for an initial three-month period, with extensions as needed, to assist the fleet in maintaining operations. He added that the fleet emphasized maintaining multiple viable suppliers to prevent disruption to existing local bait providers. Despite high costs, fish prices have improved by about 8% since January, a positive sign for the fleet. Although there have been encouraging steps, so much more can still be done and the fleet is committed to work with all partners to make sure that this continues to become a viable fleet and be revitalized.

Sword said many longline fishermen have also expressed concern about the proposed seabed-mining project.

Ilaoa asked what type of bait the fleet was using.

Feliciano said the fleet primarily uses sardines for bait.

Ilaoa asked whether the bait was being sourced through KS Marine Supply.

Feliciano said KS Marine Supply had been the sole bait supplier in recent years, but StarKist Samoa had begun importing additional bait to assist the fleet.

Sword asked whether there was a price difference between the StarKist and KS Marine supplies.

Feliciano said StarKist's bait price was slightly lower than KS Marine's.

B. American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources Report

Ilaoa reported he recently toured the shipyard facility and was impressed by CEO Carlos Sanchez's leadership in maintaining a fully self-sustaining operation that has expanded to include contracts with the local Power Authority. He also said Gov. Pula formally requested DOC to lift the ban on commercial fishing within the RAMNM beyond 12 nm. The request aims to provide the longline fleet with greater fishing access and economic relief, while maintaining the 12-mile protective zone for coral reefs, turtles and seabird nesting sites. The governor also submitted a letter to the secretary of commerce regarding ESA actions expressing concern that federal actions represent an overreach that restrict the territory's ability to manage resources and could undermine existing conservation programs. The letter requested an alternative approach that would return some management authority to the territories. He said the governor is also preparing a request to the secretary of commerce for fishery disaster relief funds under the MSA for the longline fishery. He said since 2007, the fleet has experienced steep declines in landings and revenue, coupled with rising operational costs, increased competition and low fish prices.

He said DMWR executed a contract to design a new floating dock for small boats in Pago Pago Harbor, replacing the aging structure that has become unsafe. The upgrade is essential for both commercial and recreational fishing and the agency is identifying potential funding sources for the construction phase. DMWR is also partnering with SPC, whose team visited American Samoa for a week-and-a-half to conduct tuna tagging, biosampling and close-kin mark-recapture training for staff and local high school summer students. Through this collaboration, DMWR established an agreement with StarKist Samoa to designate a fixed day and location for biosampling at the cannery. Through American Rescue Plan Act funding, the agency was able to replace its aging enforcement vessel by procuring a new 40-foot patrol boat from Safe Boats, based in the U.S. Pacific Northwest. The new vessel will enhance enforcement capability and strengthen DMWR's role as the territory's first responder for fishing-vessel incidents. The agency also hosted eight local high school students for a month-and-a-half summer program, providing work experience across the wildlife, fisheries and aquatic education divisions. He said the program helped plant the seed of interest in fisheries and resource management among the students, some of whom expressed intent to pursue marine science degrees. DMWR also continued to receive reports of increased bull shark interactions in Pago Pago Harbor, making divers reluctant to enter the water. He said the agency requested assistance from PIFSC to investigate the issue and proposed exploring a shark-tagging project to better understand shark behavior and movement in the harbor. This work would help prevent the public from trying to take matters into its own hands.

Weaver asked whether American Samoa was experiencing any resistance to the proposal to reopen the RAMNM to commercial fishing.

Ilaoa said he had not observed strong resistance and noted that he attended the IRA community engagement meetings held in June on Tutuila, Ofu and Olosega, and Ta'u and there was overwhelming support for commercial fishing to be allowed in the monument.

Weaver said protests in other regions were often led by individuals who had not attended Council meetings or reviewed the data presented there. He said those who oppose the monument reopening should participate in meetings and hear the scientific discussions directly. The closures forced fishers to travel farther offshore, increasing costs and affecting livelihoods. He said he had raised the question because Hawai'i had received considerable public resistance the previous day.

Ilaoa said it was disappointing to see folks who only walk in to make public comment and that such actions seemed a bit performative, as those individuals were not present for the scientific discussions or fishers' input. He said one of the previous day's commenters was in American Samoa and told residents that they need to let their fisheries die and find something else to drive their economy.

Itibus asked about the bull sharks, inquiring whether any scientific studies or data were available to determine where they were coming from.

Ilaoa said there was no data yet, which was why he hoped to initiate a shark-tagging project to learn where they are going and where they are coming from.

Itibus said he thought bull sharks were only found in cold waters such as Iceland and asked how they could travel to warm tropical areas like American Samoa.

Ilaoa replied that he was not a fisheries scientist but said inquiries to colleagues at NOAA and the SPC indicated that bull sharks are highly resilient and adaptable animals. He noted that American Samoa lacks rivers and estuaries — typical bull shark breeding areas — but was told that the species adapts well to various habitats.

Rosario asked whether DMWR had issued any public notices or warnings about swimming in the harbor given the large number of shark sightings.

Ilaoa said DMWR maintains an active social media page used to share safety information and that local media and radio have also helped spread the word.

Sword said the territory was accustomed to large tiger and hammerhead sharks, but in recent years it has been bull sharks of that size. Several serious incidents, including four years earlier when a diver was found half-severed after spearfishing, and another incident in Savai'i, where a 10-foot bull shark attacked a person standing in shallow water.

Rosario asked for clarification about the marine invasive species work mentioned earlier in the DMWR report and whether it might be related to the fishing fleet or to the increase in sharks.

Ilaoa said most shark sightings occurred in the harbor, where reports indicated that foreign vessels delivering to the cannery were discarding waste overboard and attracting sharks. He said just the previous day, Congresswoman Radewagen's son-in-law had been kayaking in the harbor when a bull shark struck his kayak, leaving a three-inch hole; he managed to return safely to shore. Ilaoa said the increase in such interactions was quite concerning.

C. Deep Sea Mining

1. State of Knowledge on Deep-Sea Mining Impacts

Jeff Drazen, UHM, Oceanography, presented an overview of deep-sea mining and its potential relationship to fisheries. He said mining has not yet begun commercially but interest focuses on three deposit types: hydrothermal vents (zinc, gold, silver, copper at 1,000–3,000 m), seamount cobalt-rich crusts (cobalt, copper, manganese, nickel at 800–2,000 m), and abyssal-plain polymetallic nodules (nickel and cobalt at 4,000–6,000 m), which are of greatest current interest for battery metals. There are large-scale exploration contracts in the CCZ covering approximately 1.5 million km² and additional areas of interest between Hawai'i and American

Samoa, where ancient seamounts may host crust deposits. Within U.S. waters, the USGS identified potential resources in the EEZ around Hawai‘i and American Samoa. Most proposed mining would use tracked collector vehicles to vacuum nodules and pump them through a riser pipe to the surface, generating sediment plumes and metal dust. One company, Impossible Metals, has proposed a different technology that avoids risers. Potential environmental effects include collectors removing nodules and about 5 cm of sediment which compresses seafloor habitat and destroys infauna. A single operator could mine 300–600 km² per year, or up to 10,000 km² over a 15-year license, with plumes extending 10 km or more. Because deep-sea sedimentation is extremely slow, resettled particles can smother benthic fauna. The CCZ contains roughly 6,000–7,500 species, 90% undescribed, with about half of large-animal diversity living directly on nodules. Nodule-associated habitats would not recover within management timeframes.

Midwater ecosystems may also be affected through noise and “dewatering plumes” from surface ships discharging up to 50,000 m³ per day of muddy water containing elevated copper and other metals. Models predict plumes could spread tens of kilometers and affect 3,000–15,000 km³ of water annually. Laboratory toxicity tests showed reduced survival and growth in several small aquatic species exposed to mining effluent, and food-quality analyses indicated discharge particles lack nutritional value, potentially reducing prey availability for zooplankton, micronekton and tunas. Potential fisheries impacts include altered migration or feeding patterns, ships acting as FADs, reduced midwater prey and possible metal contamination of seafood, though data are lacking. He said some overlap between prospective mining zones and fishing grounds — up to 1–12% of annual catch in the IATTC area and smaller overlaps in the WCPFC — could affect Pacific Island economies that rely on access fees. There is a need for ecological baselines and to ensure that discharging plumes are below 2,000 m or at the seafloor to minimize risks to pelagic species. He said fisheries need to participate in International Seabed Authority and NOAA/BOEM rulemaking processes and cautioned that proposals to streamline mining permits could reduce opportunities to evaluate technology changes.

Feliciano said aside from the tracked “dragging” method, there were also robotic-arm collection systems.

Drazen said the approach Feliciano referred to was being developed by Impossible Metals, which would be discussed in the next presentation.

Feliciano asked how the sediment plume differed between the two methods.

Drazen said the plume from the robotic-arm system would likely be smaller because it picks up individual nodules using hovering vehicles instead of tracked ones. However, he said the fine mud coating the nodules would still create a water plume as it exited the vehicle. He added that this technology has not yet been proven, and it remains unclear how operators would handle waste disposal if material were brought to the surface.

Feliciano said he was hopeful that it would have less impact.

Ramsey said he had concerns about the differences between U.S. waters, including American Samoa, and international waters governed by NOAA and BOEM. He said the Council continues to have discussions with NOAA regarding activities in the CCZ, noting that such mining may differ substantially from activities in the U.S. EEZ. He asked what major scientific questions still needed answers to better understand the risks.

Drazen said, while deep-sea mining has been studied intermittently since the 1970s, knowledge gaps remain significant because these are some of the most poorly studied areas in the ocean. One of the most critical questions is whether metals discharged from mining will enter the food web and seafood supply. There is also uncertainty about the biodiversity risk, noting that mining removes habitat that does not grow back for millions of years. He said because the ranges of many deep-sea species are still unknown, it is unclear whether mined areas can be naturally recolonized.

Ramsey asked Malloy about NOAA's oversight process and whether permitting standards for international waters would match those applied by BOEM in U.S. waters.

Malloy said the NOS leads the international process and aims to harmonize with BOEM's standards, maintaining similar environmental and permitting requirements. She said NOS representatives should be invited to a future Council meeting for a full briefing.

Ramsey said he supports streamlining permitting but does not want it to open the door to unintended impacts.

Weaver said he was concerned about metal discharge and plume behavior and asked where those metals go and whether data exist on their entry into the food chain. He also asked about hopper discharge at the surface and questioned how both surface and deep discharges might cumulatively affect ecosystems. He said if some of these areas are within the EEZ, why are we entertaining it when we cannot even fish in our own EEZ.

Drazen replied that Impossible Metals expects to test its technology in 2027, and more details would be presented in the next agenda item.

Sword said any mining process bringing material to the surface would require onboard water treatment to manage contamination.

Drazen said they have to figure out how to do it, because they will not know the impact until they do.

Sword said those issues would fall under BOEM's permitting review, and such concerns would be addressed before any permit issuance.

Drazen said Impossible Metals' technology is still experimental and could be quite disruptive because it differs from all other mining methods. He said issuing blanket permits could allow companies to switch technologies after receiving approval.

Sword said it is unacceptable to complete an environmental impact statement for one technology and then use another.

Drazen said NOAA's recent request for information proposed combining exploration and exploitation permits, which he opposed because it limits review of technological changes.

Ramsey asked whether baseline data collected from mining or research operations are made public.

Drazen said all data collected on the high seas by license holders must be submitted to the International Seabed Authority's DeepData repository. Within U.S. or other national EEZs, data-

sharing depends on domestic laws. He said he hoped the U.S. Deep Seabed Hard Minerals Act would establish a similar public repository.

Ramsey asked whether the mining interest Drazen mentioned in other Pacific territories referred to U.S. territories or other countries.

Drazen said there is interest in exploring both cobalt crusts and polymetallic nodules across the Pacific. Wake Island, where Japan holds a license just outside the EEZ, and other areas of the Western Pacific may also have potential. High-productivity equatorial areas are unlikely to contain nodule resources due to faster sedimentation rates.

Itibus asked whether any companies had expressed interest in mining around the CNMI, noting that he had seen petitions circulating against such projects. He said he wanted more research and data before forming an opinion.

Drazen said he was unaware of any companies formally expressing interest, as such information only becomes public when a license is filed with either the International Seabed Authority or the U.S. permitting process. He said many areas have been barely studied or not studied at all and that location-specific data are often absent or minimal.

Igisomar said he was fascinated by the topic and referenced a prior BOEM presentation that outlined potential mining locations. Given the economic challenges in island jurisdictions, it would be helpful to also understand potential benefits if mining occurred, such as reductions in fuel, utility or transportation costs.

Muña said because the territories are federal jurisdictions, most permitting would occur through the U.S. government. She said it is important to determine how each territory would benefit economically if mining took place within the surrounding U.S. EEZ. She asked whether jurisdictions would receive profits or royalties from the mined materials or only one-time permit payments, noting that resources could be worth millions or even billions of dollars.

Sword said based on hearings in American Samoa with BOEM, potential mining in the area was valued at \$3–6 billion per year, with about 1% returning to the local economy. BOEM allows local jurisdictions to negotiate royalty agreements and that American Samoa's harbor facilities and fuel-storage capacity could support such activities. He said similar promises were made in the past for other federal initiatives, such as the sanctuary proposal, with little local benefit realized.

Drazen said his presentation includes his contact information and invited members to reach out if they would like to learn more about the science and environmental aspects of deep-sea mining.

2. Impossible Metals Proposal

Oliver Gunasekara, CEO and co-founder of Impossible Metals, provided a pre-recorded presentation of the company's proposal for deep-sea mining in the U.S. EEZ around American Samoa. Impossible Metals is a startup created to develop new technology to minimize harm to the deep seabed. The company's second-generation underwater robot uses a precautionary approach to seabed mining. The company was founded because he was unhappy with the existing technology and wanted to find a better approach. The presentation included videos showing a nodule field filmed in the Cook Islands, characterized by a high abundance of nodules

and little visible megafauna. A map was shown highlighting a selected area within the U.S. EEZ around American Samoa, excluding all marine sanctuaries and located more than 100 mi offshore. He said American Samoa was chosen because there are billions of dollars' worth of critical metals in the waters around the territory. Neighboring Cook Islands issued exploration permits is an indicator of potential value and said the proposal represents a huge financial and infrastructure opportunity. The project could create skilled jobs, tax revenue and GDP growth, while helping the United States reduce reliance on China-controlled mineral supply chains.

Nearly all current deep-sea-mining systems — whether developed by Europe, China, India or South Korea — use a large, tracked dredging tractor that vacuums the seafloor and pumps sediment to the surface, destroying habitat in front of the vehicle. Impossible Metals takes a completely different approach using autonomous underwater robots that hover above the seafloor rather than drive across it. Launched from a ship, the vehicles use AI, cameras and robotic arms to pick nodules one at a time, while leaving behind in specific patterns to help preserve biodiversity and ecosystem services. The nodules are stored inside the vehicle, which returns to the ship when full, where the nodules are offloaded, the battery swapped and the vehicle redeployed. A fleet of these vehicles is designed to operate continuously to meet production demand. The system differs greatly from the traditional riser-based method. The hovering design means there is no vertical riser pump, less sediment disturbance, no dynamic positioning noise and a smaller environmental footprint overall. He said Impossible Metals' AI life-detection algorithm identifies visible life forms and marks them as do-not-take zones so the robots avoid disturbing them.

He said the company is committed to removing no more than 40% of nodules and that the system produces no discharge plume, mid-water effluent or significant noise. The vehicles only use light while operating on the seafloor for short periods and are being developed under a net-zero commitment. Impossible Metals regularly consults with scientists through roundtables and publishes feedback summaries on its website. Any mining project would require a comprehensive environmental impact assessment, including multi-year baseline studies documenting existing conditions and expected effects. The goal is to ensure there would be no significant environmental impact before permitting. The company has completed ocean testing of its "Eureka II" robot at 6 km depth off Florida, calling the technology proven and ready to scale up for production. The project could help build a new industry in American Samoa, supporting ship operations, mineral processing and job creation. The U.S. federal government strongly supports efforts to secure domestic critical mineral supply, with potential funding available from the Departments of Defense, Energy and the Interior. He said Impossible Metals is committed to protecting marine habitats, will require formal environmental review and is highly confident there will be zero impacts to fishing, which is a very important industry in American Samoa.

Sword said the video was originally shown live during the REAC meeting, which the governor of American Samoa attended. The same recording had also been shown to the American Samoa House of Representatives, where half of them said it does not look very bad at all. He said opinions were slowly coming around and that the video answered most of the common questions.

Ilaoa said while the technology appeared interesting, he wanted to address a statement made by Gunasekara in a recent Grist interview. Ilaoa read the quote directly: "These waters are not within the jurisdiction of American Samoa. They may not like this, but under federal law, three miles off the coast belong to the territory or state. From three miles to 200 belong to the federal government, and it is purely their jurisdiction. They are required to be consulted, but it is not their decision." Ilaoa said while the statement was technically true, it reflected a disregard for

the wishes of the people who live in the territory and fish in those waters and he said it was annoying to see such comments.

Sword said during the face-to-face meeting that the governor attended, Gunasekara had pledged that 1% of company profits would go to the territory, in addition to other commitments.

Ramsey said he was glad to hear that the company was willing to pledge something, but cautioned that 1% of profit is not a solid number since profits could be reinvested to reduce taxable income. There is a need to fully understand the true benefits to each region where mining may occur. He said discussions should clearly separate the CCZ from activities proposed in American Samoa, since the technology and the regulations could be very different. Historically, the Council banned bottom trawling because of its harm to the marine environment. He said there is not a big difference between bottom trawling and that tractor vacuum method but acknowledged that Impossible Metals' hovering approach might be a different conversation.

Sword said when he first saw the presentation, he too had preconceived notions of tractors on the bottom and plumes everywhere but that the new system has potential.

Sakoda asked how the vehicle would hover, whether it used propulsion or buoyancy control.

Sword said based on what he had heard, the system uses small propellers to move the vehicle as it hovers. It carries about eight nodules at a time, fills a container and then hauls it to the surface to offload before returning to the seafloor. The ships envisioned would be about a 200,000-ton vessel sitting out in the middle of the ocean doing this stuff.

Feliciano said while the use of robotic arms was impressive, it did not seem cost-effective. As mining operations increase globally, mineral prices may decrease, making the promised 1% return to the territory even smaller. He said the risks will likely outweigh the benefits for the island.

Sword said worth is in the eye of the beholder and compared it to the fluctuating value of fish depending on timing and market. He said if Homeland Security figures it is a go, that is what they will do.

3. Report on American Samoa Concerns

Ilaoa said the territory has deep concerns about the proposed commercial leasing for mineral extraction within the U.S. EEZ around American Samoa. He said the marine environment is central to Samoan culture and to the tuna industry, which is vital to the viability of the economy. The government's primary concern is the potential for significant environmental impacts from deep-sea mining activities, which could include habitat disruption, water-quality degradation and acoustic impacts from mining machinery that might disturb commercially important fish species. Such impacts could negatively affect migratory fish stocks, threaten livelihoods and destabilize the economy. He said without a thorough scientific assessment of the long-term effects of deep-sea mining, the government remains worried about the risks involved.

D. Advisory Group Report and Recommendations

1. American Samoa Advisory Panel

Felix Penalosa, Council staff, presented the American Samoa AP report on behalf of the vice chair. The AP did not have formal recommendations, but held an important discussion on deep-sea mining. He said the AP's discussion reflected both interest in potential economic benefits and concern for protecting the environment and community health.

The discussion first focused on profit-sharing and job opportunities. The AP noted that Impossible Metals had stated it would voluntarily share 1% of its profits with American Samoa in addition to any taxes owed. Members recognized that this pledge was not legally required. The AP also discussed the need for Congress to consider broader revenue-sharing mechanisms for critical minerals. Members agreed that if mining proceeded responsibly, it could create jobs for American Samoa, including work on vessels, port operations and mineral-processing support.

Second, the AP highlighted the potential for infrastructure development, particularly improvements to the Pago Pago Port. Even though the company said it would not rely on government investment, members felt that associated upgrades could strengthen the port, expand shipping capacity and possibly increase USCG or military presence, producing broader economic benefits beyond the mining itself.

Third, the AP discussed possible negative environmental impacts if mineral processing were to occur on-island. While Impossible Metals described offshore technology intended to minimize environmental harm, panel members noted that onshore processing typically requires acids, furnaces and other heavy industrial equipment. They expressed concern that this could create pollution risks and damage local resources. Some members felt that processing should occur off-island to avoid those impacts, even if it reduced potential local employment.

2. Fishing Industry Advisory Committee

There were no FIAC recommendations for the American Samoa Archipelago.

3. Scientific and Statistical Committee

There were no SSC recommendations for the American Samoa Archipelago.

4. American Samoa Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee

Penalosa presented the American Samoa REAC report and recommendations.

Regarding IRA meetings in American Samoa, the REAC endorsed the findings of the IRA meetings such as the needs for providing training and safety workshops for fishermen.

Regarding deep-sea mining, the REAC recommended the Council:

- Continue to monitor the deep-sea mining efforts in American Samoa and provide the fishing community with information and analysis of impacts to fishing and fishery resources as it becomes available.
- Request the deep-sea mining companies include educational opportunities to get locals involved in the industry.

Regarding monuments, the REAC recommended the Council:

- Review its fishing regulations for the RAMNM to determine whether it is still suitable for American Samoa residents given the current federal efforts.
- Communicate to the administration the need to change the name from Rose Atoll to *Muliava*.

5. American Samoa Council Family Meeting

Penalosa presented the report and recommendations from the American Samoa Council family meeting.

Council family advisors made the following recommendations:

- The Council should request that the American Samoa Government reconstitute the Fisheries Task Force to address ongoing issues.
- The Council should expand its scholarship program to include vocational training opportunities.
- The Council should request that monuments be opened to fishing and that the name of Rose Atoll be officially changed to *Muliava*.
- Council staff should work with the AP to develop talking points and questions for deep-sea mining.
- The Council should recommend that BOEM provide translation support ahead of and during public meetings.

E. Public Comment

Archie Soliai provided comments on the deep-sea-mining. He said he appreciated the comments made both locally and during the Council meeting and stressed that it is important to weigh both sides of the discussion. This was part of BOEM's process in reviewing an unsolicited lease request. He said there is a need for due diligence in evaluating both risks and benefits, citing a Samoan proverb, "E gase le pa'a i lona vae" — which means "someone who comes to grief because of his own actions." The territory should not look a gift horse in the mouth regarding potential economic opportunities. Soliai also said he acknowledged the Council's efforts to obtain recognition for American Samoa's fisheries but asked whether NMFS could do more to highlight these concerns for the territories. He said a former regional administrator had stated that rulemaking could occur simultaneously with ongoing WCPFC actions and said he was unsure that this had been addressed earlier in the meeting under Pelagic and International Fisheries. Soliai said NMFS should consider unilateral action to ensure parity among U.S. territorial fisheries at the domestic level. American Samoa is recognized as a Participating Territory of the United States within WCPFC and such actions would ensure compliance with the Ensuring Access to Fisheries Act and its implementing guidance. He said continued lip service treating the territories as second-class citizens must stop, applauded the Trump Administration for previously addressing these concerns, and reaffirmed his support for the Council's ongoing work to sustain the nation's fisheries.

Manny Dueñas commented on the deep-sea mining agenda item, stating that he was very concerned about its potential effects. He said his main concern was ensuring that, when the U.S. participates in deep-sea mining activities, particularly those involving American Samoa, the government should review and compare impacts with those of other types of mineral extraction used for alternative energy sources. He said the duration and scope of impacts and knowing the timeline for environmental effects is critical whether it is going to be several years or only good for a week. He said in Guam, contaminants enter the marine environment from terrestrial sources and have already affected local fish stocks and asked whether deep-sea mining could add to PFAS-type pollutants that impact fisheries. He also said it was important to establish a baseline. NOAA often fails to measure the efficacy of its conservation programs, such as in the NWHI or other monument areas. He said he was glad that the mining proponents were at least discussing

baseline studies to help analyze impacts to fisheries because the proximity of the proposed mining areas to the islands is concerning.

F. Council Discussion and Action

Regarding deep-sea mining, the Council:

- 1. Directed staff to continue monitoring deep-sea mining developments in American Samoa and work with the Council's advisory groups to provide information and analysis of impacts to fishing and fishery resources as they become available.**
- 2. Requested BOEM require its potential lessees to provide translation support ahead of, and during, public meetings in American Samoa.**
- 3. Directed staff to invite NOAA to provide an overview on the proposed commercial recovery permit applicants in the CCZ.**

Moved by Ilaoa, seconded by Weaver.

Motion passed.

Regarding American Samoa fishery issues, the Council:

- 4. Encouraged the American Samoa Government to reconstitute its Fisheries Task Force to address ongoing fishery issues in the territory.**
- 5. Requested NMFS PIFSC work with DMWR to develop a research and monitoring program to better understand bull shark presence and behavior in American Samoa waters.**

Moved by Ilaoa, seconded by Feliciano.

Motion passed.

XIII. Administrative Matters

A. Financial Reports

Simonds reported she has no further comments on the administrative budget beyond what is included in the briefing document, except awaiting the last tranche for 2025. It is unclear whether coral reef funding will be included in FY2026 or whether a budget will pass. If it does, the councils and the Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions would see only a small increase.

Mitsuyasu referred members to the financial documents in their briefing materials and provided updates on the following open awards:

- Coral Reef, grant period to end Sept. 30, 2025, a request for an extension to finish a project related to Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management Indicators for the Mariana Islands has been submitted.
- IRA is actively managed with projects to be implemented and expects funds to be expended as the grant period ends December 2026.
- SFF American Samoa currently has five open awards, with three sub-grants in place. The marine conservation coordinator along with the DMWR staff and the Council island coordinator are collaborating to implement those projects. The 2025 award for \$171K for fuel for the longline fleet is in the application process.

- CNMI has four open awards, with one sub-grant actively in place. They are in the process of hiring a marine conservation coordinator to implement the projects. A couple of awards require collaboration with CNMI DLNR to reprogram and move forward by requesting the reprogram with the grants officer.
- Guam and the CNMI also have applications for the SFF in the amount of \$171K each. The Guam award relates to the fishing platform and the CNMI award relates to community projects and the DFW data-related work.

B. Administrative Reports

Elle Granger, Council staff, reported no major updates since the last Council meeting. The fiscal officer resigned effective July 15, and the annual audit is scheduled to conclude on September 30. The administrative report includes updates on Council membership and recusal determinations. Members will be asked to update their 2026 financial disclosure forms in December, though they may contact GCPI or the Council office with questions on voting on any action items or submit updated forms at any time.

C. Council Family Changes

Mitsuyasu reported on updates to the AP membership. For the American Samoa AP, Ray Tulafono was nominated to replace Ilaoa, and Louis Soliata was nominated as an alternate to replace Feliciano. On the Guam AP, Toves was nominated to replace Jessie Rosario. For the CNMI AP, Dre Lizama replaced Mike Fleming, Anthony Guerrero replaced Tenorio, and Roberto was nominated as an alternate. For the FDCRC Technical Committee Brett Taylor replaced Terry Donaldson, Carvalho and Sabater replaced Hongguang Ma and Eva Schemmel, and John Brodziak was removed. For the Archipelagic Plan Team, Fernan Asalele replaced Ochavillo as the DMWR member. For the Pelagic Plan Team, Ochavillo is nominated as the DMWR member.

D. Meetings and Workshops

Simonds reviewed the upcoming schedule of meetings and key events. The second round of IRA meetings will be held in American Samoa, Hawai'i and the Mariana Islands. A hybrid PAC meeting is planned for October, with travel costs to be covered by participants. The virtual Council Coordination Committee meeting will take place October 15–16, followed by the Coral Reef Task Force meeting in Puerto Rico in November. The timing of the State Directors Meeting is still being confirmed. The annual WCPFC meeting will be held in Manila, and the December 15–17 Council and SSC meetings will be virtual. In 2026, the Council will host a side workshop at the 44th International Sea Turtle Society Symposium focused on cultural perspectives on turtles. Members have also received the proposed 2026 meeting schedule, designed to avoid major holidays.

In celebration of the MSA anniversary, the Council Coordination Committee and staff are planning events, including a video project documenting the Council's history through interviews across the islands. Some footage is expected to be ready by the December meeting.

E. Executive and Budget Standing Committee Report

Sword reported the Executive and Budget Standing Committee met to review financial and administrative reports. The standing committee understands and emphasized the importance of the IRA projects, most of which are expected to be completed by December 2026. Sword also

reported there was discussion of Dubai expressing interest in fishing and transshipment in the CNMI and Guam, indicating there may be individuals at the WCPFC meeting. Lastly, the standing committee highlighted the Council family changes.

F. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

G. Council Discussion and Action

Regarding administrative matters, the Council:

- 1. Accepted the 204th Council meeting financial and administrative reports.**

Moved by Rosario, seconded by Ilaoa.

Motion passed.

Regarding Council family changes, the Council:

- 2. Made the following changes to its advisory groups:**
 - a. Appointed Ray Tulafono as a member to the American Samoa AP to replace Nathan Ilaoa.**
 - b. Appointed Louis Solaita as an alternate on the American Samoa AP to replace Edgar Feliciano.**
 - c. Appointed Audrey Toves as a member to the Guam AP to replace Jesse Rosario.**
 - d. Appointed Dre Lizama as a member to the CNMI AP to replace Michael Fleming.**
 - e. Appointed Anthony Guerrero as a member to the CNMI AP to replace Lino Tenorio.**
 - f. Appointed James Roberto as an alternate member to the CNMI AP.**
 - g. Appointed Brett Taylor (UOG) to replace Terry Donaldson (UOG) on the FDCRC Technical Committee Research Subpanel.**
 - h. Appointed Felipe Carvalho and Marlowe Sabater (PIFSC) to replace Hongguang Ma and Eva Schemmel as members on the FDCRC Technical Committee Data Subpanel.**
 - i. Removed John Brodziak (PIFSC) from the FDCRC Technical Committee Research Subpanel.**
 - j. Appointed Fernan Asalele as the DMWR member on the Archipelagic Plan Team to replace Domingo Ochavillo.**
 - k. Appointed Domingo Ochavillo as the DMWR member on the Pelagic Plan Team to replace Sean Felise.**

Moved by Ilaoa, seconded by Rosario.

Motion passed.

Regarding cultural take of green sea turtles, the Council:

- 3. Directed staff to send a letter to the Trump Administration:**
 - a. To explore changes to the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles to allow for the sustainable cultural take of green sea turtles in the Western Pacific region; and**
 - b. To initiate a status review of the green sea turtles distinct population segments in the territories of Guam and American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the**

Northern Mariana Islands and evaluate whether their listing status may be revised.

Moved by Rosario, seconded by Itibus.
Motion passed with Malloy abstaining.

XIV. Other Business

Three resolutions recognizing the service and contributions of former Council members Judith Guthertz, Archie Soliai and Shaelene Kamaka‘ala were presented and read.

Moved by Ilaoa, seconded by Perez.
Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned.