



PACIFIC ISLANDS FISHERY NEWS

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Fish Are Food: Embracing Sustainable Fishing in Pacific Island Fisheries

In the animated film *Finding Nemo*, a group of well-meaning sharks proclaim, “Fish are friends, not food!” While the message may be at home in the wonderful world of Disney, the reality in the Western Pacific tells a different story: Fish *are* food—and a vital source of it.

For centuries, fish have sustained families, fueled celebrations and strengthened cultural connections in the Pacific. Fishing plays a key role by providing locally caught ‘ahi, ‘ōpaka and other favorites at farmers’ markets, fish auctions and even directly to families. However, the real challenge is not whether we should eat fish—but *how* we can do so sustainably.

Fish are Food



Photo: Keith Kamikawa.

For Pacific Islanders, seafood is more than just a meal—it is essential to their diet and way of life. Fresh catches, from reef fish to pelagic species, have traditionally provided nutrition, embodying a philosophy of taking only what is needed to sustain families while minimizing waste. This caring approach has maintained fish stocks for generations, but modern challenges are disrupting this balance.

One of the most pressing concerns is food security. The Billfish Conservation Act restricts the commercial sale of species like marlin and sailfish in the United States, increasing reliance on costly imports. Combined with rising fuel and operational expenses, this limits access to traditional diets and increases financial strain on Pacific Island families. Misinformation about mercury or overfishing in local waters also impacts perceptions and seafood demand.

Further, access to fishing grounds restricted by marine national monuments forces fishers to venture farther offshore, raising costs for consumers, while an aging workforce threatens the future of local fisheries and increases dependence on imports.

For Pacific Islanders, fish are not just a source of sustenance—they are a cornerstone of cultural identity. The relationship with the ocean extends beyond the dinner table, shaping traditions,

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... the real challenge is not whether we should eat fish—but *how* we can do so sustainably.



Photo: Travis Tia.

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



ceremonies and community ties that have been nurtured for generations.

Fish are Culture

Fish and fishing are woven into the social fabric of the islands. Indigenous people needed the ocean to provide food in places without land animals or even edible plants beyond what they brought with them in their canoes. For thousands of years, these people harvested food from the sea. No part of the fish was wasted. Non-consumable parts were used for tools, weapons and cultural adornments.



Photo: Len Nakano.

Traditionally, fish are not only food but essential to ceremonies, gatherings and practices that honor ancestors and strengthen community ties. In many villages, fish are shared through communal distribution systems, where fishers ensure that families, elders and community members are fed, reinforcing a crucial role of fishers as providers and cultural custodians.

Regulations, however, can inhibit these legacy practices. Restrictions on traditional turtle take and protections ordered by the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for species like giant clams have limited indigenous rights to harvest culturally significant species. These policies, designed to protect species, often overlook their importance to cultural observances.

In some cases, protected habitat designations further restrict access to traditional fishing grounds, affecting the ability of native communities to fulfill historic responsibilities.

Fishing in the Pacific also supports broader U.S. needs. Tuna from American Samoa's StarKist cannery supplies U.S. schools and military bases.

Sadly, Pacific fisheries still struggle against remnants of colonialism and restrictive policies that effectively criminalize cultural practices, challenging efforts to sustain indigenous lifeways in a modern regulatory landscape.

Fish are Money

For people in the Pacific, fish and fishing are part of the island identity. When tourists arrive in the islands, they want to eat fresh fish. Whether it is a poke bowl or the catch of the day, visitors associate the islands with great seafood. Healthy commercial fisheries also help promote a vibrant travel industry in all the islands.

In 2023, a total of 239,900 recreational anglers in Hawai'i contributed \$820 million and supported 5,490 jobs statewide, while visitor expenditures amounted to more than \$14 billion, surpassing pre-COVID-19 totals by more than \$2 billion.

But providing food for tourists is only one economic factor. The longline fisheries in Hawai'i and American Samoa contribute significantly through direct employment of hundreds of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars. Indirectly, these fisheries also provide additional jobs and revenue through spending on fuel, bait, gear, food, supplies, boat maintenance and other related services.

And this does not include millions of dollars generated through selling fish to the StarKist Samoa cannery or through the Honolulu Fish Auction. In 2023, the Hawai'i longline fisheries revenue reached almost \$120 million and the American Samoa longline revenue was close to \$3 million (2023 Annual SAFE Reports). Additionally, charter fishing, where people pay for boats to take them fishing, generates more than \$50 million annually and supports hundreds of jobs both on- and off-island.

Fishing and fisheries are central to the economic livelihood of the islands. Yet they seem continually threatened by demands for more protection of certain already-protected species, national edicts that seek to close more areas to fishing, and international inroads from imported, less regulated, fish that undercut and undermine the pricing in U.S. fisheries.

Fisheries are Important to the US

The Pacific Islands hold a vital role in global fisheries and U.S. geopolitical stability, reinforcing food security and influence in a region with rising tensions with China. Integral to this is the U.S. purse seine, longline and small-boat fisheries in American Samoa, which significantly bolster the territory's economy. In 2019 alone, these fisheries contributed \$291.5–\$292.5 million in indirect and induced economic effects, accounting for 28%–29% of American Samoa's

total output. The Hawai'i longline fishery, the largest food producer for the State, supports tens of thousands of jobs and generates \$110-125 million dockside value annually. The Hawai'i fishery also supplies up to two-thirds of the fresh bigeye and yellowfin tuna produced in the United States and consistently provides more than half of the country's domestic swordfish.

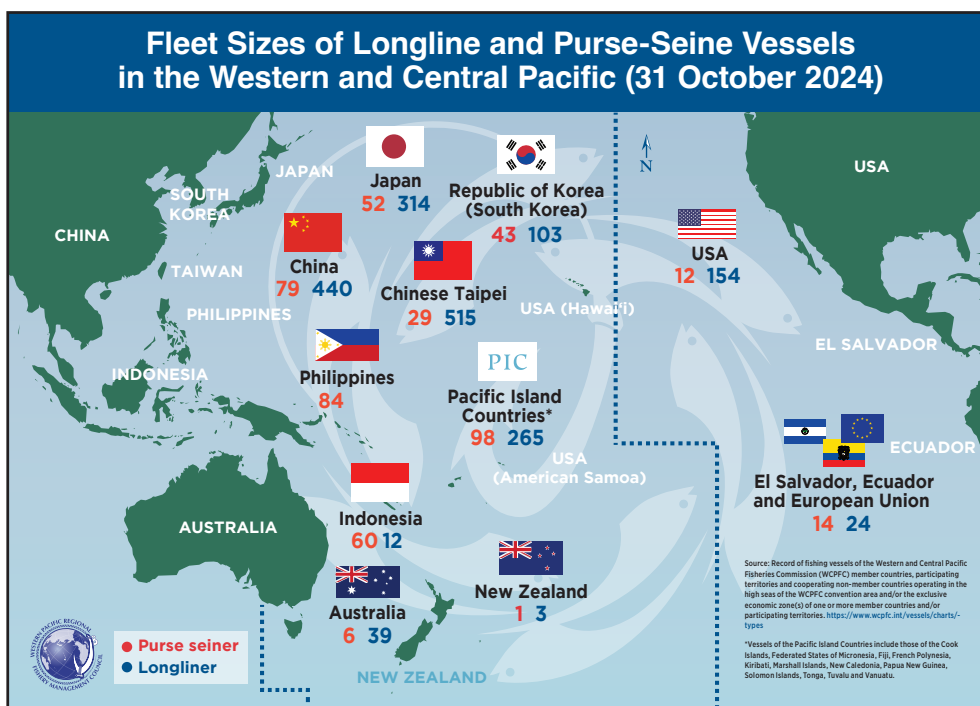
By supporting local fisheries, the United States maintains its presence, strengthens alliances and upholds sovereignty in Pacific waters, ensuring a critical voice in international fisheries management. However, policies restricting domestic waters threaten these fisheries, pushing them into high seas competition.

These come in the form of marine national monuments that are mandated with a stroke of a presidential pen via Proclamation, rather than a scientifically informed process.

The influence of special interest groups may sway leaders into closing more waters, even on the high seas, as demonstrated at the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP16) meeting in October 2024. At COP16, proposed high seas marine protected areas were introduced through establishing "ecologically or biologically significant marine areas."

The impact of legislation like the Jones Act also comes into play, as policies affecting shipping and transportation within U.S. territories can inadvertently drive up costs for fishers and island communities. Re-evaluating such laws could strengthen local economies and support the U.S. presence without sacrificing island livelihoods or traditions.

In fairly maintaining competitive local fisheries, the United States can protect Pacific resources and uphold its geopolitical interests without resorting to more extreme measures, such as



military expansion or infringing on the rights of Indigenous communities. Fisheries empower the United States to "keep a chip in the game," fostering diplomatic ties and safeguarding regional stability through collaboration rather than occupation.

So, the next time you are standing at the poke counter at the grocery store or looking at that fried fish sitting in the pan at the barbecue, remember: fish aren't just friends, they're also the food that connects us to the ocean, our heritage and each other. The goal isn't to stop eating fish, but to do it in a way that allows islanders to pursue their way of life. The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council works to ensure that this continues, creating policies that balance conservation with cultural and economic needs. And to borrow a line from *Finding Nemo*, we "just keep swimming."

Stay informed and participate in the future of our fisheries by attending Council meetings, submitting public comments and following updates on the Council's website at www.wpcouncil.org. 🐟

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UN Biodiversity Negotiations Fast-Track MPAs on High Seas While US Marine Monuments Close Domestic Waters to Fishing



The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (COP16) held Oct. 21 to Nov. 1, 2024, in Cali, Colombia, advanced several biodiversity goals, notably enhancing indigenous representation and identifying ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs).

A permanent body was established to integrate Indigenous peoples into biodiversity negotiations, aiming to strengthen their influence in protecting biodiverse ecosystems. In the Pacific, 40% of the world's tuna is caught within the sovereign

waters of Pacific Islands (small island developing states, or SIDS), where Indigenous peoples, often underserved, rely on tuna resources. They access these resources through rights-based licensing and shared resource management. The U.S. Pacific territories, which fall under Council jurisdiction, also consist of Indigenous communities dependent on fishery resources. However, in global biodiversity negotiations, their voices are represented through the United States rather than separately.

supported by the United States, Palau and Chile to fast-track MPAs. However, tuna industries are concerned that these MPAs may reduce fishing rights on the high seas. The United States and its Pacific Territories, already affected by no-take marine national monuments, face additional restrictions from MPAs that could limit high seas fishing. The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) management regime also seeks to restrict high seas fishing, pushing activity into the sovereign waters of member nations, including the U.S. Pacific Islands. This limits where U.S.

“... there is little scientific evidence to support the notion that prohibiting tuna fishing in large MPAs provides adequate biodiversity protection, given tuna’s migratory nature.”

The discussions at COP16 also focused on identifying EBSAs, which support the "30x30" conservation target to protect 30% of the world’s land and oceans by 2030. The BBNJ Agreement, adopted in June 2023, provides a framework for establishing marine protected areas (MPAs) on the high seas. This move is seen as a step toward achieving the 30x30 target, with EBSAs

fisheries can operate, conflicting with domestic policies. Furthermore, there is little scientific evidence to support the notion that prohibiting tuna fishing in large MPAs provides adequate biodiversity protection, given tuna’s migratory nature.

These concerns about MPAs are further amplified in the context of global negotiations. At COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, held in November 2024, discussions focused on key milestones in the climate change fight. Delegates emphasized MPAs as tools for biodiversity protection and climate impact mitigation. Talks included expanding protections, improving governance of MPAs in international waters and securing financing to ensure effective management. However, debates persisted over funding adequacy and equitable support for SIDS reliant on marine resources. 🐟

COP16 opens in Cali, Columbia. Photo: Convention on Biological Diversity.



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200th Council Meeting Highlights, September 23-25, 2024



The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council held its 200th meeting in September 2024, a significant milestone in its 48-year history.

Council Chair Will Sword said, “I’m proud of the Council’s accomplishments throughout the years, achieving many of our conservation goals through sustainable management of the region’s large and small fisheries. We have met the challenges of mitigating protected species interactions, growing capacity in our communities and supporting the continuation of cultural values and management through the melding of Western and indigenous methods. We face many challenges, particularly the changing of the world’s climate, which will be devastating to our islands, and we will confront them with the support of our extensive array of advisors and our government.”

Land Acknowledgement Highlights Indigenous Roots and Equity

Themes of cultural recognition, indigenous legacies and ocean security sparked the opening of the Council meeting.

Shae Kamaka’ala, Chair of the Council’s Fishing Right of Indigenous People Standing Committee, welcomed members in recognizing that the region encompassing the Council’s jurisdiction has indigenous, ancestral caretakers and pays respect to these longstanding cultural roots. Her remarks included a statement that “Hawai’i remains an illegally occupied state of the United States government.”

“It is important for the Council to make a conscious effort to ensure equity in our work and recognize the existence and sovereignty of the Indigenous people of the Western Pacific,” commented Kitty Simonds, Council Executive Director.

The Council welcomed Rear Admiral Sean Regan, U.S.



Coast Guard (USCG) District 14, whose career includes service at the White House as Director of Maritime Security Policy, Arctic Region, on the President’s National Security Staff; advisor to the National Security Advisor, Homeland Security Advisor and the President. The Admiral said he appreciated the response the USCG has received from the people in the region and that he was favorably impressed by the Council’s work in protecting fisheries.

Captain Jennifer Conklin described the USCG’s “Operation Blue Pacific,” underscoring its role as a persistent presence of the U.S. government as a trusted partner in enhancing the safety, security and prosperity of the region.

During the meeting, Nate Ilaoa from American Samoa criticized the USCG’s response to the territory, calling it insufficient. He said that the Deeds of Cession grants powers to the United States, but also requires protections. He requested the USCG to protect American Samoa from illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and foreign incursions and said the territory’s citizens deserve better.

The Council recommended collaboration with USCG to develop a plan for providing assets and resources to the territory, while also making certification courses more accessible to its citizens.

Action Items

The Council approved a 493,000-pound annual catch limit (ACL) for the Deep 7 bottomfish complex in the main Hawaiian Islands for fishing years 2024-2025 to 2026-2027. Catch limits are determined by subtracting the overfishing limit plus scientific uncertainty factors from the acceptable biological catch, then further adjusting for SEEM (Social, Economic, Ecological and Management) variables.

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Council members celebrating 200th Meeting. Front row (l-r): David Sakoda (designee for Dawn Chang), Matt Ramsey, Sylvan Igisomar, Chelsa Muña, Judith Guthertz, Frank Perez. Back row (l-r): Gene Weaver, Sarah Malloy, Roger Dang, Archie Soliai. Not pictured: Chair Will Sword, Pedro Itibus, Shaelene Kamaka'ala, Colin Brinkman, Brian Peck, RADM Sean Regan.

In 2019, the Guam bottomfish fishery was declared overfished, which required the Council to rebuild the stock, per the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The Council developed a rebuilding plan that set an ACL of 31,000 pounds, with in-season monitoring that would close the fishery if the limit is exceeded. A stock assessment update presented in June 2024 found that while Guam has not overfished, it also has not met the rebuilding threshold.

The Council recommended increasing the rebuilding plan ACL to 34,500 pounds, allowing for continued fishing while seeking to ensure the stock is rebuilt by 2031. This option would also apply a three-year catch-averaging formula that would result in reducing subsequent catch limits by the average amount overfished.

Council Receives Praise, Spars with NMFS on Policies

Sam Rauch, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs at the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), opened the second day of the meeting by complimenting the Council for its achievements.

“This Council doesn’t get enough credit for leadership in the region and the example it has set nationally and internationally; things done here echo throughout the world,” said Rauch.

“To name a few,” Rauch continued, “the Council prohibited destructive gears, explosives, poisons; implemented measures on drift gillnets before the drift gillnet act; created areas where industry can thrive and at the same time reduce impacts to protected species; and crafted gear measures with industry that are models for the rest of the world—circle hooks, wire leaders and vessel monitoring systems (VMS).”

No fish stocks are overfished in the Western Pacific Region, except striped marlin due to international fishing pressure, and very few others on the U.S. continent and the Caribbean.

Also during the second session, Eric Kingma, Executive Director of the Hawaii Longline Association, presented a \$500,000 check to NMFS, aimed at supporting fisheries development in the U.S. Pacific Territories—investing in capacity building in the Western Pacific region.

Giant Clams ESA Listing

Council members expressed frustration with the proposed Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listing of giant clams in the U.S. Pacific Territories. NMFS initiated a status review in 2017 in response to a petition to list 10 species of giant clams under the ESA, but published the proposed rule in July 2024, opening the proposal for a 90-day public comment period. NMFS presenter John Rippe said that for giant clams in general, quantitative data and survey data is very limited.

Council member Sylvian Igisomar questioned if NMFS had considered unpopulated as well as populated areas when gathering information about the giant clams’ spatial distribution.

“I feel NMFS is just ramming this through the system,” said Igisomar, Secretary of the Department of Lands and Natural Resources in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). “Some of these species shouldn’t have been [proposed]—just because you can’t access an area, doesn’t mean the clams are not there.”

The Council reiterated its request for NMFS to engage early with local agencies and communities, and to collaborate with the governments of American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI. The members emphasized the importance of working proactively with the U.S. Pacific Territories before considering ESA listings and critical habitat designations.

Council member Chelsa Muña questioned NMFS’s listing of giant clam species as endangered in regions like Guam and the CNMI where those species haven’t been present for many years. “We are working with Palau to reintroduce the species. It’s disconcerting to see the ones that don’t occur in the Marianas on the list since they’re not part of the natural habitat. You will be restricting our ability to repopulate the area,” Muña emphasized.

Members noted that from experience with other ESA-listed species like turtles, once giant clams are listed, it is difficult to delist them later. Muña said, “If climate change is included as one of the threats, then there is nothing we can really do to change that impact.”

Muña, director of the Guam Department of Agriculture, added this would affect attempts to recover the species, as is the case with several species of corals. “Outplantings require permits, and you can’t outplant corals that are endangered because you have to harvest,” she noted.

Currently, the United States does not recognize the indigenous peoples of the Western Pacific Region—Kānaka Maoli, Samoans, CHamoru and Refaluwasch—in the same way it does federal Native American tribes. This difference puts the Pacific groups at a disadvantage in federal relations.

Rippe explained that under the ESA, the United States is required to list species based on their status throughout their entire range, not just in certain areas. Though some giant clam species in question don't occur in the Mariana Archipelago, they exist elsewhere in their range, such as the Great Barrier Reef, the Philippines and Indonesia, which justifies the listing.

American Samoa Council member Archie Soliai added, "For the whole session we heard on ESA and Marine Mammal Protection Act issues, what sticks out the most is 'restrict, control and prohibit.' Giant clams are important to our culture, and this inhibits our food security."

The Council asked NMFS to extend the public comment period to allow more time for agency outreach to affected communities and for community members to comment. It also asked that NMFS work with governments of American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI to review data supporting proposed rules and their socioeconomic and cultural impacts.

New Indigenous Committee to Strengthen Traditional Voices in Pacific Fisheries



Bronson Azama, of Kānaka Maoli ancestry, gives his public testimony on the proposed Pacific Remote Islands national marine sanctuary and offshore development at the 200th Council meeting in Honolulu.

Concluding its meeting, the Council established an Indigenous Committee to provide recommendations to federal authorities on cultural fishing rights and related issues.

Sub-panels for Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI will include members with expertise in traditional fishing practices and community ocean activities in their respective regions. The new committee will augment the Council's Fishery Rights of Indigenous People Standing Committee, which was established in the mid-1980s.

Throughout its 48-year history, the Council has addressed indigenous issues and sought to modify the impact of federal fishery management

on Native Hawaiians, Samoans, Chamorros and Carolinians, who have fished in the Western Pacific for centuries.

With the growing emphasis on ecosystem-based management, traditional ecological knowledge, equity, and environmental justice, the Council created the new Indigenous Committee to ensure culturally relevant recommendations that include indigenous perspectives in the region's decision-making process.

The Council requested a presentation on how the recognition process for Indigenous peoples could work and the benefits an existing system now provides to Native American tribes. Currently, the United States does not recognize the Indigenous peoples of the Western Pacific Region—Kānaka Maoli, Samoans, CHamoru and Refaluwasch—in the same way it does federal Native American tribes. This difference puts the Pacific groups at a disadvantage in federal relations.

The ESA, for example, allows subsistence use of endangered species as a food source for Native American tribes, but such exceptions were not considered for regional Indigenous peoples when the United States entered international agreements to protect green sea turtles, a traditional food in the Pacific. Expanded recognition could address existing and future issues affecting Pacific Islanders.

National Marine Sanctuaries in the Pacific

The Council reviewed a NOAA status update on the proposed national marine sanctuaries in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) and Pacific Remote Islands (PRI). Since March 2024, public hearings have been held across the Hawaiian Islands on the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the NWHI sanctuary, with no action yet reported on a draft EIS for the PRI sanctuary.

The Council expressed concerns over the process for establishing fishing regulations under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, section 304(a)(5), contending it fails to provide a clear rationale for why such regulations are necessary. The Council stressed the need to assess potential threats to sanctuary resources—including fishing—before determining regulations to address those concerns. 🐟



Fisheries Sector Urges President Biden to Halt Marine National Monument Proposals



Representatives from a coalition of more than 150 U.S. fishing and seafood industry associations, businesses and community leaders, including the Hawaii Longline Association, sent a letter to President Biden Nov. 18, 2024 (<https://tinyurl.com/MNMLettertoBiden>), urging him to reject proposals to create or expand marine national monuments in the U.S. exclusive economic zone. They highlighted the critical role of U.S. fisheries, which generate \$321 billion in sales, support 2.3 million jobs and uphold sustainable practices under the Magnuson-Stevens Act.



Offloading bigeye tuna at Pier 38 in Honolulu. Photo: Hawaii Longline Association.

The letter emphasized that “U.S. fisheries are recognized globally as a gold standard for fisheries management and marine conservation” and noted that they “produce exceptional environmental outcomes, preserve vital cultural traditions, create jobs... and provide billions of nutritious meals.” The signatories argued that further reliance on the Antiquities Act for large-scale marine protected areas would “harm the Americans we represent, employ, and feed while failing to advance effective and durable marine conservation.”

Instead, they pointed to U.S. Regional Fishery Management Councils, which implement “science-driven, stakeholder-informed processes” and already manage significant area-based conservation efforts. They warned that unilateral action under the Antiquities Act risks “alienating stakeholders” and creating static protections ill-suited to dynamic ocean conditions.

The letter concluded by urging the administration to “avoid any such designations during the remainder of [its] time in office,” emphasizing the need for collaborative, adaptive management over sweeping federal mandates. ➡



Offshore Energy Proposed to Meet Energy Needs in Hawai‘i and Guam

In late 2023, the Inflation Reduction Act amended the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) to include U.S. territories like American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). This authorized the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) to issue leases to support the development of renewable energy around the U.S. territories. In 2024, Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland announced a new five-year offshore wind leasing schedule for offshore wind that includes projects in Hawai‘i and Guam. This aligns with President Biden’s goal of 30 gigawatts of offshore wind generation capacity by 2030.

Following the final rule to the OCSLA, Governor Lourdes Aflague Leon Guerrero of Guam requested that BOEM establish the Guam Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Force. This initiative aims to explore the potential for developing renewable offshore energy off Guam’s coast, marking a significant step in the island’s efforts to diversify its energy sources.

Offshore energy development in the Western Pacific is not new to the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, as BOEM has been conducting research on the feasibility of offshore wind in Hawai‘i. This research has included studies on seabird impacts, infrastructure development, wind feasibility via LIDAR buoys, and baseline data on Hawai‘i’s fisheries, among other factors. The Council recognized offshore wind energy is an important element of the Biden Administration’s push to reduce reliance on fossil fuels. In response, it created

an Offshore Energy Policy¹ to address and minimize potential concerns and impacts on fishing communities.

BOEM anticipates 20–30 windmills for Hawai‘i and fewer than 10 for Guam, reflecting differing energy demands. Task force meetings in August and September outlined goals and objectives, but communities raised concerns about fisheries, habitats and indigenous representation.

The Council, at its 200th meeting in September, after hearing a presentation from BOEM, emphasized the importance of early and inclusive community engagement, particularly for fishing sectors facing challenges with infrastructure, ocean-use conflicts and habitat disruption. BOEM should provide seats on the task forces for the Western Pacific’s historically unrecognized Indigenous people. Questions remain about how offshore wind will affect fisheries in Guam and the CNMI and where fishers can turn during seasonal derbies. With limited safety infrastructure and longstanding fishing traditions at stake, the fishing community wants to ensure planning is collaborative to balance renewable energy with maritime heritage.

This development marks a critical shift for the region, intertwining sustainability, energy independence and traditional practices. ➡

Reference: ¹www.wpcouncil.org/about-us/council-policies

Mariana fishers leave port for a seasonal fishing derby. Photo: Felix Reyes.

What the BFISH Camera Survey Pause Means for Bottomfish and Future Assessments

Hawai‘i’s Deep 7 bottomfish fishery, consisting of seven species found in mid to deep waters around the main Hawaiian Islands, has long been integral to the state’s commercial and non-commercial fisheries. These species—*‘ōpaka* (pink snapper), *kalekale* (Von Seibold’s snapper), *onaga* (long-tail red snapper), *ehu* (short-tail red snapper), *lehi* (silver mouth snapper), *gindai* (Brigham’s snapper) and *hapu‘upu‘u* (Hawaiian grouper)—are essential both culturally and economically. However, managing these fisheries has been complex, requiring continual improvement in stock assessments and sustainable management strategies.

One of the significant advancements the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) has made in stock assessments has been incorporating fishery-independent biomass estimates derived from both research fishing surveys and the stationary stereo-video camera system (MOUSS). While effective in providing additional data, the MOUSS camera system faced challenges in recent years.

Why the Pause on Cameras?

The MOUSS system was introduced to complement research fishing and became part of the operational Bottomfish Fishery Independent Survey in Hawai‘i (BFISH). It was intended to capture absolute abundance (a true measure of population size) in order to be used for stock assessments. However, during peer reviews, concerns arose about the camera’s effective detection radius and its reliability in estimating absolute abundance. Despite its past use in stock assessments, the MOUSS, at this time, can only provide relative abundance (how common a species is relative to others), something that is also collected during the research fishing survey. To get at absolute abundance, PIFSC would need to invest a large amount of resources into the MOUSS, which it currently does not have.



A MOUSS camera system ready for deployment to gather data for the Bottomfish Fishery Independent Survey in Hawai‘i. Photos: Pacific Islands Fisheries Group.

With declining budgets, PIFSC faced a choice—continue the camera program or focus solely on research fishing, which provides the same relative abundance data plus life history, length data, etc. Given these constraints, the decision was made to pause the camera survey and emphasize research fishing operations. In other regions, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is doing research on their camera systems such as upgrading the cameras, improving lighting, area-swept calibration and overall quality. The goal is to get at absolute abundance and the results will be used to enhance the MOUSS in future years. Meanwhile, funding in the Pacific Islands region will prioritize the research fishing survey, which offers more opportunities for fishermen to participate.

What Does This Mean for Stock Assessments?

The good news for the bottomfish fishing community is that the camera data aligned closely with findings from research fishing. NMFS does not anticipate significant changes to stock assessments due to the pause as the assessment is driven by the commercial catch data and research fishing survey information. Nevertheless, PIFSC has established a Research Track to evaluate potential impacts and ensure that any changes are fully understood prior to future assessments.

PIFSC is committed to transparency and collaboration. Before finalizing any updates, the Bottomfish Working Group, which includes fishers involved in BFISH, will review the adjustments. This ensures that the needs and insights of bottomfish fishers are considered and incorporated into the next benchmark assessment.

While the shift marks the end of the camera’s role in the operational survey for now, it reflects a strategic focus on maximizing the value of research efforts. These adjustments aim to improve the accuracy of bottomfish data, supporting sustainable fishing and the long-term health of bottomfish stocks. 🐟

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Council Members and Advisors Call for Equity in MPA Creation at AFS Meeting



Mark Fitchett, John Gourley, Alister Hunt, Ray Hilborn, Jacey Van Wert, Nerea Lezama-Ochoa, Simone Franceschini, Will Sword, Archie Soliai and Nate Ilaoa at the AFS meeting session on Sept. 16, 2024, on Large Blue-Water MPAs.



Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council members and advisors participated in a session at the 154th Annual American Fisheries Society meeting, held Sept. 15-19, 2024, in Honolulu, on “Large Blue-Water Marine Protected Areas: Benefits and Costs,” which drew around 70 attendees. Dr. Ray Hilborn, a member of the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), chaired the session and provided a talk evaluating impacts the Papahānaumokuākea Marine Na-

rate increases to the expansion without considering broader regional dynamics,” Hilborn explained.

Presentations from Council members and advisors Will Sword, Archie Soliai, John Gourley, Eric Kingma and Nate Ilaoa highlighted the impact of marine national monuments on Pacific Island communities. They raised concerns about expanding large, closed areas in U.S. Pacific waters. American Samoa Advisory Panel Vice Chair Ilaoa likened the push to close more waters to colonialism, arguing that Pacific Islanders are being forced to meet the national “30 by 30” goal—protecting 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030—at great cost to their local economies.

A proposed designation of the Pacific Remote Island Areas (PRIA) as a national marine sanctuary could potentially shut down tuna fishing in the remaining open waters 50 to 200 nautical miles seaward of Palmyra and Howland/Baker Atolls. Tuna-rich U.S. waters around Jarvis, Johnston and Wake Islands are already closed to fishing. Hilborn noted none of the tuna species are at risk of overfishing and recent studies concluded closures in nearby Kiribati had no conservation benefit. Soliai, Council vice chair from American Samoa, pointed out that “Pacific Islanders already carry the disproportionate burden of this 30 by 30 initiative, because 90% of this goal is already in our waters.”

Ilaoa and Soliai stressed the economy of American Samoa relies heavily on the tuna industry, which provides thousands of jobs and sustains the territory’s shrinking population. The territory’s last remaining tuna cannery depends on a steady supply of U.S.-caught fish and helps subsidize shipping for most goods, keeping costs affordable for residents. Closing more waters to U.S.-flagged vessels could devastate the local economy, as international agreements already limit their access to the high seas. The United States has also not distinguished an American Samoa purse seine fishery, which could add some relief to international restrictions.

“They are shoving this down our brown throats,” said Ilaoa. “This Administration seems willing to destroy our American Samoa tuna industry, crippling our already struggling economy, just to look good to some people on the mainland thinking they’re protecting something.”

As the lead keynote speaker at the plenary, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa faculty Kawika Winter, said, “We don’t need more marine protected areas, we need more marine RESPECTED areas.”

Council advisors and staff also participated in other symposia, sharing insights on incorporating social, economic and ecological knowledge into management, engaging fishing communities in science and management, and undergraduate fisheries curriculum. Meeting attendees gave presentations, joined discussion panels and promoted the Council’s work through an exhibit. 🐟

”
“We don’t need more marine protected areas, we need more marine RESPECTED areas.”

Kawika Winter, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa faculty

tional Monument (PMNM) has had on yellowfin and bigeye tuna stocks and resulting catch rates. Hilborn countered an October 2022 study that claimed the 2016 expansion of PMNM had “spillover benefits” for tuna fisheries, arguing that increased tuna catch rates were due to a pre-existing rise in tuna biomass, not the expansion. “Considering how little yellowfin tuna was caught in the Monument Expansion Area, it is just biologically impossible to attribute catch



(l-r) Council staff members Zach Yamada, Asuka Ishizaki and Amy Vandehey share information with meeting attendees.

Council Staff Contribute to PICES Workshop on Knowledge Sharing



(l-r) Former NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center Director Mike Seki, Council Executive Director Kitty M. Simonds and new PICES Chair Tetsuo Fujii (Japan) at the annual meeting's opening session Oct. 26, 2024.

Council staff participated in the North Pacific Marine Science Organization (PICES) annual meeting, held at the Hawai'i Convention Center in Honolulu from Oct. 26 to Nov. 1, 2024. As panelists in a workshop on “Exploring

International Knowledge Co-Production,” staff members shared insights on how scientific data is used for management decisions. They emphasized the value of a “bottom-up” approach, where stakeholder input guides research priorities, and simultaneously identifies management and policy needs.

PICES focuses on waters 30 degrees north and northward. Fisheries under Council jurisdiction in the Western Pacific region occur south of this, but northern oceanographic processes have long been recognized as early indicators for fisheries and ecosystems in sub-tropical and tropical regions to the south. Council staff participation highlighted how PICES can better apply its science to support stakeholders, not just in northern waters. With climate change shifting oceanic resources, it's important for PICES to expand its collaboration with organizations in the southern regions to address these evolving challenges.

Mike Seki, former NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center director, was honored at the PICES opening session. Given his long-term contributions to the organization, the governing council presented Seki with the 2024 PICES Chair Award. 🐟

Public Hearings on the Proposed ESA Listing of Giant Clams

In September 2024, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) held public hearings in American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) to discuss the proposed listing of 10 species of giant clams under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). These species hold deep cultural significance in the territories, tied to traditional practices like fishing, ceremonies, jewelry-making and navigation.

Community members expressed concerns about cultural and economic impacts of the listing, emphasizing the need for localized research and longer review periods. In response to initial comments provided at the hearings, and requests from the territorial resource agency directors, American Samoa Fono and Council, NMFS extended the public comment period by 120 days, now closing Feb. 19, 2025.

Attendees committed to collaborating with federal agencies to ensure local perspectives shape the conservation

strategy. NMFS plans to use the input gathered from the hearings to guide the ESA decision-making process and will provide updates on the next steps after reviewing all comments.

Hearings in American Samoa



The public hearings in American Samoa included a listening session and two public hearings. The first, aimed at Tutuila residents, had a low turnout, mostly drawing resource managers and agency representatives. The second, focused on Manu'a, was well attended by fishermen and community leaders who voiced strong concerns about the proposed listing. Chiefs and leaders highlighted the lack of research in Manu'a, urging scientists to gather data locally. A veteran fisherman called for

greater transparency and engagement, concluding his remarks with a traditional Samoan song* that resonated with the audience.

While efforts were made to accommodate non-English speakers by conducting the hearings primarily in Samoan, a noticeable language barrier remained between NMFS representatives and the local community. This gap hindered full understanding and participation, highlighting the need for improved communication strategies in future engagements.

Concerns over the data used to support the proposed listing were raised during the sessions. Staff from the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) questioned the reliability of the information, pointing out an eight-year gap between the last status review and the current 90-day public comment period. They requested additional time to review the proposed rule, emphasizing that the existing data might not adequately reflect the status of the clam



CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

populations in the territory.

Participants suggested organizing workshops before public hearings to better educate the community, ensuring that attendees can provide informed feedback. The hearings concluded with a commitment from Congresswoman Uifa'atali Aumua Amata Radewagen to address perceived flaws in the process and existing statutes. Council member and DMWR Director Taotasi Archie Soliai expressed hope that the discussions were recorded and emphasized the importance of accurately translating community comments for NMFS's consideration in the proposed rule.

Hearings in Guam



NMFS held a public listening session and hearing Sept. 17, 2024, at the Pacific Islands Club Resort in Tumon, which saw low attendance. Concerns were raised about the proposed rule's impact on local entrepreneurs who craft and sell jewelry using *hima* (giant clam), particularly fossilized *hima*, as the rule would limit exports to whole specimens only. NMFS noted that crafting using *hima* would be allowed under certain conditions and pre-existing products would be exempt.

Two public forums hosted by the Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources (DAWR) at the Sinajana and Inalahan Community Centers on October 4 and 5 had better attendance. Congressman James Moylan and Congressional candidate Ginger Cruz expressed strong opposition to the rule. Moylan vowed to work with Congress to cut NOAA's enforcement funding if the designation passes, while Cruz advocated for permits to allow cultural harvesting of *hima*. Council member Judith Guthertz criticized the lack of communication from NOAA and emphasized the need for the community to educate federal officials about Guam's culture.

Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association's President Manny Dueñas warned that once the ban is imposed, it is irreversible. Guam Advisory Panel member Mike Gawel expressed concerns about the potential negative impacts on conservation, research and traditional uses. Similar sentiments were shared at both public forums.

Hearings in the CNMI

In the CNMI, public forums and hearings were planned across all three islands: Tinian (canceled due to Tropical Storm Bebinca), Rota (September 12) and Saipan (September 19). The Saipan forum, despite low community attendance,

allowed about 40 agency leaders and staff to address concerns about the proposed listing's impact on cultural practices, inter-island trade and the adequacy of supporting data. Attendees called for stronger federal-local collaboration on enforcement and public education. Presenters, including Advisory Panel member Cecilio Raiukiulipiy, John Castro and Lino Olopai, emphasized the cultural significance of *hima* in seafaring, medicine and crafts. Former Council member John Gourley encouraged the development of sustainable aquaculture for *hima* to support local economies.

At the Saipan public hearing, around 60 attendees highlighted the listing's potential harm to livelihoods, tourism and local artisans. Calls for a 120-day extension to the public comment period were made, alongside advocacy for sustainable *hima* aquaculture. Participants questioned the practicality of enforcement without adequate federal resources. Rosemary Camacho, acting director of the Division of Fish and Wildlife, voiced concerns about equity and cultural inclusion. The need to balance conservation with cultural and economic needs was emphasized, with a strong call for collaboration, respect for traditions and sustainable practices.

In Rota, discussions focused on balancing species protection and ecosystem health with cultural use. A local jeweler expressed initial reservations but was reassured that *hima* for local use would not be restricted. Participants appreciated NOAA's efforts to include Rota and asked about projects to restore *hima* populations in local waters. 🐟

* Tatau Sāmoa - Sāmoan tatau song

<i>'O le mafua'aga lenei ua iloa</i>	This is the known origin
<i>O le taga o le tatau i Sāmoa</i>	of the art of Tatau in Sāmoa
<i>Ole Malaga a teine e toalua</i>	The journey of two sisters
<i>Na fe'ausi mai i Fiti i le vasaloloa</i>	Who swam through the big vast ocean from Fiji
<i>Na lā 'aumai ai o le ato au</i>	They brought with them a basket of the tatau tools
<i>Ma si a lā pese e tutumau</i>	and the song they repeated
<i>Fai mai e tatā o fafine</i>	it said only the women receive the tatau
<i>'Ae lē tatā o tane</i>	and the men do not
<i>A o le ala na tatā ai o tātane</i>	The reason the men receive the tatau
<i>I na ua sesē si a lā pese</i>	is the sisters sang their song incorrectly
<i>Taunu'u i gatai o Falealupo</i>	When they arrived at the coastal waters of Falealupo
<i>'Ua va'aia loa o le faisua ua tele</i>	They saw a huge clam
<i>Totofu loa lea o fafine,</i>	They dived for it,
<i>Ma ua sui ai si a lā pese:</i>	and when they came up their song changed:
<i>Faimai e tatā o tātane,</i>	It now says only the men receive the tatau
<i>'Ae lē tatā o fafine</i>	and the women do not
<i>Silasila i si tama ua ta'atia</i>	Look at the young man lying down
<i>'O le tufuga lea ua amatalia</i>	as the tufuga begins his work
<i>Tālofa ua tagi aue aue</i>	Pity the crying of the young man
<i>Ua otī'oti solo o le 'autapulu tele</i>	The stinging bite of the autapula teeth
<i>Sole sole ia e loto tele</i>	Young man be brave
<i>'O le ta'āloga fa'atamatāne</i>	it is a game of men
<i>E ui lava ina tigā tele</i>	Although it is very painful
<i>'Ae mulimuli ane ua e fefete</i>	Yet afterwards you will be proud of it

Camp Blaz: Balancing Military Readiness with Guam's Community and Environmental Concerns



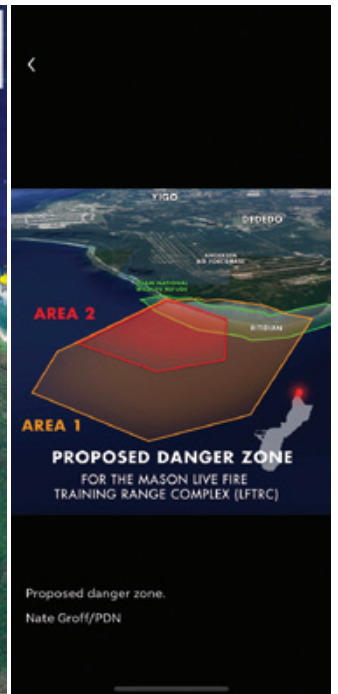
Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz in northwest Guam symbolizes the U.S. commitment to Indo-Pacific security. Officially activated in 2020, it includes firing ranges and Surface Danger Zones (SDZs) critical for live-fire training. These facilities, designed for weapons ranging from small arms to .50 caliber machine guns and grenades, support the relocation of 5,000 Marines from Okinawa and align with a broader strategic realignment. The base's population is expected to reach 44,000 by 2037, marking significant growth for Guam.

While SDZs ensure safety for boaters during exercises, they have raised concerns about fishing access and impacts on Guam's fragile ecosystem. The Council's Military Buildup Working Group, chaired by Council member and University of Guam professor Judith Guthertz, toured the firing ranges Sept. 20, 2024. The ranges are designed for diverse live-fire exercises, accommodating small arms, rifles and larger weapons systems such as .50 caliber machine guns, grenades and mortars. The group also observed a hi-tech camera system that monitors boat incursions into SDZs.

Guam residents and environmental advocates remain concerned about the military's growing footprint, particularly regarding habitat disruption, pollution and reduced fishing access. Surveys show 55% of fishers reporting disruptions, with 20% of trips affected by military activities. Efforts to balance military readiness with fishing community needs include funding initiatives like the Greg D. Perez Agaña Marina Master Plan, Agat Marina improvements, east side launch ramp, fish aggregating device deployment and Sumay Cove Marina expansion. The Council's Guam Advisory Panel has worked with local leaders and the military to address fishing access, environmental impacts and improve community relationships.



Camp Blaz represents the U.S. commitment to maintaining a strong presence in the Indo-Pacific, while also underscoring the challenges of doing so in a way that respects Guam's environment and communities. As the base's live-fire training and SDZs become active, dialogue among military leaders, local stakeholders and environmental experts will be essential. Balancing operational needs with environmental stewardship and addressing land-use concerns will shape the future of the base, ensuring its role in regional security aligns with the well-being of Guam's people and ecosystem. 🐟



An SDZ is a designated no-access area established for the safety of boaters during active military firing range exercises. Source: Nate Groff/PDN.

Addressing Regulatory Challenges for CNMI Bottomfish Fishers



At the 198th meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council in March 2024, concern was raised about bottomfish reporting requirements in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Council members questioned whether federal data collection regulations were creating unnecessary duplication for local fishers. In response, the Council tasked its staff to collaborate with NOAA to review CNMI laws and assess if they could meet the data needs for the Mariana Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP).

Federal regulations, established in 2009, state that “the owner of any vessel used to commercially fish for, transship, receive, or land Mariana bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) or ecosystem component species (ECS) shoreward of the outer boundary of the CNMI management subarea” must have a permit registered to said vessel.

The NOAA Office of Law Enforcement works with its Joint Enforcement partners in the CNMI and Guam through Joint Enforcement Agreements, enabling local agencies to enforce federal laws. While CNMI’s mandatory reporting

to raise awareness and improve compliance.

Addressing Fishermen’s Concerns



CNMI fishermen posing with their catch near Anatahan. (l-r) Traven Quitugua, Jesse Boy Taitano and Jack Rios. Photo: Christian Pangelinan.

The CNMI Advisory Panel recommended reducing regulatory burdens for commercial bottomfish fishers in territorial waters. In response, the Council has worked with DFW and PIRO to align territorial licensing and reporting with existing federal requirements for those fishing in the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) around the CNMI.

Despite these efforts, fishers still face challenges, including the need for two separate permits and reporting systems. Additionally, confusion persists over the delineation of federal waters, particularly in the CNMI’s 0 to 3-mile zone, complicating compliance efforts.

The Council remains committed to addressing these concerns and ensuring that the data collection process is efficient and effective for all involved. Continued collaboration with local fishers and regulatory bodies will be essential as these changes are implemented. 🐟

CNMI Reporting Requirements	Federal Reporting Requirements
Commercial harvesters and purchasers will report data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial Harvester Report • Commercial Harvest Cash Sales Report • Commercial Purchaser Data receipt form 	Vessel owners/operators will report data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fishing (and Transshipping) Logbooks • Sales Reports (40-foot and larger vessels)
Required to report data within 0-3 nautical miles	Required to report data within 3-200 nautical miles (EEZ)
Must report all locally caught/sold species that will enter commerce through sale, barter or trade	Must report commercially fished for, transshipped, received, or landed BMUS or ECS
Submission/collection of data must be done every 1st and 15th of the month	Must record catch and effort in logbooks within 24 hours of fishing activity and submit form to National Marine Fisheries Service within 72 hours of each landing
No vessel size requirement and no vessel monitoring system (VMS) is required	40-foot and larger vessels must carry an operational VMS
Not required to report on the number of protected species released uninjured, injured or dead	Required to report on the number of protected species released uninjured, injured or dead

By the 199th meeting in June 2024, it was determined that federal regulations were complementary, not duplicative, and removing them would create gaps in data collection.

Background

In 2012, CNMI implemented a catch recording and reporting system for commercial harvesters and purchasers. The Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) had been reliant on voluntary data collection until cooperation had decreased. This system was later formalized in 2019 with the Department of Lands and Natural Resources (DLNR) requiring mandatory reporting for marine life “that is intended to enter commerce through sale, barter or trade.”

requirements are not currently enforced, DFW Conservation Enforcement Officers are collaborating with the DFW Data Section to engage local markets, restaurants and hotels. Outreach efforts are ongoing, and a public information session may be planned in the future



Council Advisory Panel members Lino Tenorio (left) and Tony Guerrero are committed to helping the fishing community accurately report their data to support management. Photo: Lino Tenorio.



As the confetti from the historic change in Washington D.C. is cleaned up, there is also a lot that may happen before both a new congress is seated on January 3 and the new administration takes office Jan. 20, 2025. Right now, the “lame-duck session,” the period after an election and before the new congress, is upon us and Congress will consider finishing up any old business.

While this time is normally concentrating on budget bills, there have been lame-duck session bills that included fisheries legislation as well.

In 2017, senators introduced the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act to expand recreational fishing opportunities through enhanced marine fishery conservation and management, and for other purposes. That bill was brought back to life in December 2018, during the lame-duck session, passed by both the Senate and the House within days and signed by the president by the end of the year. The bill amended the Magnuson-Stevens Act to include improved data collection for recreational fisheries, and provided authority to use additional information in managing recreational fisheries and review the process for allocation in mixed-use fisheries in the Gulf and South Atlantic.

Other legislation during the lame-duck session has also included fisheries-related topics into omnibus funding bills or other legislative packages. While potential revisions to existing bills must remain germane to those bills, new

legislation could consolidate supported portions of other bills into a single package for introduction and passage during this session. This makes it important to be aware of the existing legislative efforts from the 118th Congress.

The House of Representatives has introduced and passed bills on ocean acidification, marine debris, coastal habitat, marine turtles and shark depredation. The Senate also passed a bill on marine debris (S. 318) which will need to reach agreement with the House and its bill (H.R. 886). Other bills addressing commercial fishing, endangered species, aquaculture, and seafood remain in committee and must be heard to advance before the end of this Congress.

It is uncertain how the lame-duck session and changes in the administration and Congress will unfold. However, fisheries remain a key priority for both, ensuring their continued prominence in discussions and decisions. There may be changes coming our way or there may continue to be disagreements. In any case, 2025 will bring a new congress and the introduction of new bills and re-introduction of those bills that still warrant its attention.

Congratulations to President-elect Trump and to all the returning/new representatives in Congress. We hope fisheries are a priority in the 119th Congress and the new administration as we all work to maintain healthy and sustainable U.S. fisheries. For more information on what bills are of interest to fisheries in the Western Pacific, visit www.wpcouncil.org/legislative-congressional. 🐟



RECIPE

Bottomfish in Oyster Sauce

*Courtesy
Lino Tenorio*

Ingredients

1 3 to 5-lb fish
vegetable oil
1 onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped
1 tbsp ginger, minced
1/2 cup kimchee base
1/2 cup water
sea salt, to taste
1/4 cup lowfat milk
2 tbsp oyster sauce

Instructions

Fry fish in oil for about 2 minutes. Place fish in deep baking pan, cover with foil and bake at 350°F for 20-30 minutes. Add remaining ingredients, cover and bake for additional 10 minutes.
Note: Remove excess water, if needed. If too salty, add water or lowfat milk.

Get to Know Your Council Members: Francisco Perez

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



Frank Perez in front of the Council's tables at the Guam Museum, part of the temporary exhibit "I Maneguihan" (Those that fish) in Hagåtña from April to June 2024.

Francisco "Frank" Perez served in the Guam Air National Guard where he retired after 24 years as a Master Sergeant. He joined the Council in August 2024, bringing his military experience and specialized training to his role. Frank embraces his Chamorro heritage and practices his culture, serious

about its perpetuity, especially the practice of sustainable fishing. He comes from a fishing family in Chalan Pago. If not trolling or bottom fishing on his boat, he enjoys fishing at his family beach in Nomña, Malojloj. Frank runs his own air conditioning sales and service company.

You're new to the Council and the Magnuson-Stevens Act process. Do you have any takeaways from your brief time as a Council member?

The commitment to fostering a healthy marine environment and supporting livelihoods that depend on fishing in the community.

Guam is undergoing a major military buildup. As a military retiree and Council member, how can you help the merge the interests of the military and fishing community?

By promoting collaboration and a mutual understanding with the military and fishing community towards alternative solutions and fair compensation for our fishermen. I look forward to liaising with the military not just in Guam, but in the Northern Mariana Islands to achieve common ground where the mission is achieved, yet the communities' concerns are fairly addressed.

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

- Increased community education, capacity building and involvement
- Aquaculture development
- Encourage sustainable fishing practices like taking only what you need

What does effective fishery management look like to you?

- Harvest sustainably, prevent overfishing and allow fish stocks to be rebuilt
- Ongoing education and outreach to raise awareness about sustainability and conservation

Lastly, what is your favorite fish to eat?

Yellowfin tuna / Sashimi



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youtube.com/wpcouncil

Council Family Updates

At the 200th Council meeting, the Council supported the following advisory body changes:

- **Keena Leon Guerrero**, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), on the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)
- **Jude Lizama**, CNMI DFW, to the Fishery Data Collection and Research Committee-Technical Committee

New Scholarship Recipients

The Council awarded the U.S. Pacific Territories Fishery Capacity-Building Scholarship to three students for the 2024-25 academic year. Congratulations!



Kiana Camacho – from the CNMI, obtaining a bachelor of science degree in integrative biology from the University of Guam (UOG)



Jeniel Mian - from Guam, obtaining a bachelor of science degree in integrative biology from UOG



Ami Vice - from Guam, obtaining a master of science degree in biology from UOG

New Publications

Leilani Sablan Naden, former Council scholarship recipient, published research Sept. 23, 2024, from thesis work for her master of science degree at UOG on the dynamics of Guam’s recreational fisheries. The study investigated how environmental factors such as season, moon phase and geography influence catch and effort in Guam’s artisanal reef fisheries. Findings revealed that fishing success was highest during the calm season on windward reefs and varied by moon phase for different fishing methods, providing a predictive framework to support improved fisheries management.

Sablan, L, Taylor, B, & Houk, P. 2025. Environmental drivers of non-commercial reef fisheries in Guam. *Fisheries Research*, 281, 107180. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fishres.2024.107180>

SSC member and University of Washington professor **Ray Hilborn**, Council staff **Mark Fitchett** and others published a study Nov. 24, 2024, on spillover from marine protected areas (MPA). Spillover refers to the movement of fish or larvae from closed areas to fished areas, often assessed by measuring abundance or catch rate gradients near boundaries. However, this study finds that while gradients may indicate higher abundance within closed areas, they do not always equate to benefits for fisheries, with net benefits primarily observed in regions with intense pre-closure fishing pressure. One example explored was the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Despite being one of the largest MPAs in the world, the PMNM showed no significant fishery benefits for tuna. The closure shifted fishing efforts elsewhere but did not noticeably increase tuna populations or catches.

Hilborn, R, Fitchett, M, Hampton, J. et al. 2025. When does spillover from marine protected areas indicate benefits to fish abundance and catch?. *Theor Ecol*, 18, 1 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12080-024-00596-2>

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) released its annual *Fisheries of the United States, 2022*. The report compiles key fisheries statistics for commercial landings and value and recreational catch from the previous year into a snapshot documenting fishing’s importance to the nation. “In 2022, Hawai‘i’s commercial fishing and seafood industry supported 10,229 full- and part-time jobs and generated \$823.7 million in sales, \$249.6 million in income, and \$366.5 million in value-added impacts in the Western Pacific Region.” www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/fisheries-united-states-2022

Upcoming NMFS Deadlines

December 13: Pre-proposals due for Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program funding – for innovative solutions to fisheries bycatch challenges. www.fisheries.noaa.gov/grant/bycatch-reduction-engineering-program-funding

December 23: Nominations due for the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee, responsible for advising the Secretary of Commerce, NOAA and NMFS on all matters concerning living marine resources that are the responsibility of the Department of Commerce. www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/11/06/2024-25747/nominations-to-the-marine-fisheries-advisory-committee



American Samoa Dept. of Marine and Wildlife Resources Director Archie Soliai, CNMI Governor Arnold Palacios, Council Executive Director Kitty M. Simonds and Council Chair Will Sword at the Honolulu main office in October 2024.

Upcoming Events

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

with existing WCPFC conservation and management measures, below catch from 2019.

Option 3: Set a longline retention limit of 360 t and a catch limit of 371 t, consistent with catches of striped marlin from 2018 to 2020 and a proposed WCPFC rebuilding plan subject to review in November and December 2024.

Option 4: Prohibit retention of WCNPO striped marlin (a retention limit of 0 t).

3. Hawai'i and American Samoa Longline Fisheries Crew Training Requirement (Initial Action)

Biological opinions (BiOps) issued in 2023–2024 for the Hawai'i deep-set (DSLL), Hawai'i shallow-set (SSLL), and American Samoa longline (ASLL) fisheries included a reasonable and prudent measure (RPM). This RPM requires the Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO) Sustainable Fisheries Division (SFD) to implement mandatory species handling training for crew members by May 2025, within two years of the BiOps' publication. PIRO SFD, in coordination with the Hawaii Longline Association (HLA), PIRO Protected Resources Division (PRD) and the Council developed a pilot crew training program to implement this requirement. The first pilot program training session was conducted in April 2024 and is expected to run through May 2025, with the target of training all current crew members in the Hawai'i and American Samoa longline fisheries.

At its 200th meeting in September 2024, the Council reviewed an options paper outlining considerations for implementing the crew training requirement specified in the recent BiOps.

At its 201st meeting, the Council will review a preliminary draft regulatory amendment and consider taking initial action to implement this requirement for longline fisheries under the Pelagic FEP. As part of the initial action, the Council will also consider refining the regulatory specifications associated with the action. These decision points pertain to the frequency and flexibilities of the certification requirements.

Alternative 1: Revise the Longline Fishery Protected Species Workshop requirement to include a crew training requirement.

Decision Points for Defining Regulatory Specifications:

a) Frequency of crew training certification requirement

b) Frequency of owner/operator certification requirement

c) Flexibilities in certification options between crew and owner/operator

d) Additional flexibilities to prevent delays in fishing trips

Alternative 2: No Action/Status Quo

4. Development of an Electronic Monitoring Program for Western Pacific Fisheries (Initial Action)

To date, electronic monitoring (EM) in the Western Pacific longline fisheries has been a voluntary program focused on research and development rather than statutory monitoring. To implement EM as a management tool, the Council must authorize its use. At its 199th meeting, the Council directed staff to work with NMFS PIRO and advisory bodies to explore regulatory considerations for using EM to supplement or replace data collection currently conducted by federal observers. At its 200th meeting, the Council further directed staff to finalize a draft information paper outlining regulatory considerations for EM implementation, to be reviewed by the Pelagic Plan Team and the Council at the next meeting.

With the decline in human observers in 2024 and beyond due to NMFS budgetary limitations, there is a need to transition the existing EM program from a research tool to one that fulfills monitoring requirements in Pacific Island fisheries. Developing an EM program to support monitoring is a high priority for ensuring statistically reliable estimates of catch, bycatch and interactions with protected species.

At its 201st meeting, the Council will consider initial action to authorize EM as a monitoring mechanism under three key decision points.

First, the Council may consider if EM may be authorized as either an optional or mandatory monitoring program for fishing vessels. Second, the Council may consider the scope of EM implementation, i.e., whether EM should be authorized for longline fisheries under the Pelagic FEP or for any fishery under all applicable FEPs as it becomes available. Third, the Council may determine the relationship with existing monitoring: whether EM should complement human observers or complement human observer coverage while validating self-reporting logbooks.

5. Update on American Samoa BMUS Revision (Updated Action)

In June 2023, during its 195th meeting in American Samoa, the Council took initial

action to revise the American Samoa Archipelago FEP by updating the BMUS list, adding new species, and designating some as Ecosystem Components. This action also requires establishing ACLs, which have been effective in many fisheries but challenging for data-limited fisheries due to gaps in stock biomass data and difficulties in monitoring and enforcement.

To address these challenges, NMFS amended the National Standard 1 guidelines in 2016 to allow "alternative approaches" for certain stocks lacking sufficient data to manage with MSY or proxies. One proposed alternative for the Pacific Islands Region is the "rate-based" ACL approach, which uses metrics like mean fish size to estimate fishing mortality rates. Lower mean fish sizes indicate higher fishing mortality and reduced spawning potential, while larger sizes suggest healthier stocks. Reference points and control rules would guide adjustments to fishing efforts, enabling sustainable management despite data limitations. This method aligns with current MSY-based rules but offers flexibility tailored to data-limited scenarios.

The decision to use a rate-based ACL for a data-limited stock should be based on whether:

1. The stock qualifies for use of the (h)(2) flexibilities for data-limited stocks;
2. There are sufficient data to estimate the current average fishing mortality rate, or a proxy for F, at the maximum fishing mortality threshold; and
3. It is possible to manage with/enforce a rate-based approach.

If these conditions are met, the Council could consider adopting a rate-based ACL as an alternative to the standard weight or numbers-based approach. However, it was unclear from the Council's initial action whether this rate-based approach would apply exclusively to American Samoa bottomfish or if the Council intended to integrate it as "Tier 6" into the broader tiered system of allowable biological catch (ABC) control rules used for other fisheries.

At its 201st meeting, the Council may consider revising its initial action on the American Samoa Archipelago FEP BMUS list by directing staff on the Tier 6 rate-based ABC control rule approach. Options include reserving the Tier 6 control rule for American Samoa BMUS, applying it to select fisheries, or making it available for all fisheries. 🐟

Upcoming Events

The 154th Scientific & Statistical Committee (SSC) meeting will be held Dec. 12-13, 2024, at the Council office, 1164 Bishop St., Ste. 1400, Honolulu, HI. The meeting will be in a hybrid format, with in-person participation available for SSC members and the public, or remote participation via Webex: <https://tinyurl.com/154SSCMtg>.

Major agenda items include: American Samoa bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) revision (action item); Electronic monitoring (EM) program development for Western Pacific fisheries (action item); Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) uku stock assessment update; SSC strategic planning; False killer whale foreign fleet impact analysis; and Noncommercial fisheries data.

The 201st meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will be held Dec. 16-17, 2024, virtually with host sites for Webex at 1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400, Honolulu, HI; Tedi of Samoa Bldg., Suite 208B, Fagatogo Village, AS; BRI Bldg., Suite 205, Kopa Di Oru St., Garapan, Saipan, CNMI; Cliff Pointe, 304 W. O'Brien Drive, Hagatña, Guam. <https://tinyurl.com/201CouncilMtg>.

Major agenda items include: Guam bottomfish rebuilding plan modifications (final action); U.S. catch limits for North Pacific striped marlin (initial action); Hawaii and American Samoa longline fisheries crew training requirement (initial action); EM program development for Western Pacific fisheries (initial action); American Samoa BMUS revision (initial action); 2024 MHI uku stock assessment update; False killer whale foreign fleet impact analysis; Coral critical habitat designation final rule; 2024 Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission meeting outcomes; and Council Inflation Reduction Act program report.

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

Summary of Action Items at the December 2024 Council Meeting

The Council will consider and may take action on the issues summarized below.

1. Modifying the Guam Bottomfish Rebuilding Plan (Final Action)

A 2018 stock assessment determined that the Guam bottomfish fishery complex was overfished and experiencing overfishing. Consequently, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) informed the Council of the need to end overfishing and develop a rebuilding plan within 15 months. In response,

the Council reduced catch limits to under 31,000 pounds and developed a rebuilding plan to restore the stocks. However, concerns about data quality and the stock assessment led the Council to request a reassessment by NMFS.

In June 2024, NMFS presented an updated stock assessment for Guam's bottomfish management unit species (BMUS), which incorporated recommendations from a prior data workshop. The assessment concluded the fishery was no longer overfished but had not yet met the rebuilding criteria outlined in the Mariana Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP). A Western Pacific Stock Assessment Review panel validated the findings, and the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) approved it as best scientific information available. At its 198th meeting, the Council directed staff to develop options for modifying Guam bottomfish rebuilding plan, requested catch projections from the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center and sought a progress review from the Pacific Islands Regional Office.

At its 201st meeting, the Council will consider taking final action on an alternative to modify the rebuilding plan and specifying the annual catch limit (ACL) and accountability measures (AMs) for the Guam bottomfish fishery to rebuild the stock by 2031. The Council will consider the following:

Alternative 1: No action. Do not modify the rebuilding plan. ACL of 31,000 pounds with in-season monitoring and higher performance standard.

Alternative 2: Modify the rebuilding plan.

- Maintain an ACL of 31,000 pounds and modify the AM to discontinue the use of in-season monitoring and apply a post-season overage adjustment to prevent overfishing and rebuild the stock by 2028;
- Modify the ACL to 34,500 pounds and the AMs to discontinue the use of in-season monitoring and apply a post-season overage adjustment to prevent overfishing and rebuild the stock by 2031;
- Establish a prohibition on bottomfish fishing in federal waters to rebuild the stock by 2026.

2. US Catch Limits for North Pacific Striped Marlin (Initial Action)

At its 199th meeting, the Council was informed that the Western and Central North Pacific (WCNPO) striped marlin stock status had changed to no longer overfished, though overfishing continues under the Pelagic FEP. At its 200th meeting, NOAA General Counsel Pacific Islands and the Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO) Sustainable Fisheries Division

Council Calendar 2024-25

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

DECEMBER

12-13

154th Scientific & Statistical Committee (SSC) meeting

13

Executive & Budget Standing Committee meeting

16-17

201st Council meeting (virtual)

JANUARY

22-23

Joint Intercessional Fishery Ecosystem Plan Team meeting

MARCH

10-14

155th SSC meeting (tent)

24-28

202nd Council meeting, Mariana Islands (tent)

(SFD) clarified that the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) Section 304(i) obligation to address international overfishing was nullified. As a result, NMFS withdrew a proposed rule to set a catch limit of 457 tons (t) with a retention limit of 443 t for vessels with a Hawai'i limited-entry longline permit. The withdrawn rule was originally based on a Council recommendation from its 193rd meeting to satisfy MSA 304(i) obligations.

The Council may recommend a new initial action under MSA Section 303(a)(1)(A) to prevent overfishing, rebuild overfished stocks and promote long-term fishery health. The Council may revisit previous alternatives as options under a new initial action to establish a catch limit in line with MSA 303(a)(1)(A), 304(e) or other provisions of the Act.

At its 201st meeting, the Council may take action to set a catch limit for WCNPO striped marlin and reconsider the following:

Option 1: No action or status quo, do not set a retention limit for WCNPO striped marlin.

Option 2: Set a longline retention limit of 443 t and a catch limit of 457 t, consistent

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