

Council Addresses Unfair Trade and Problems with Foreign Fish Flooding US Pacific Islands Markets



At its 199th meeting in June, Council members lamented the influx of foreign-caught fish flooding U.S. markets, undermining local fishermen. This issue affects not only Hawai'i but also U.S. territories, where local fisheries struggle with profitability due to cheaper foreign imports. Fishermen are frustrated by the lack of price adjustment after retailers replace locally caught fish with lower-cost foreign alternatives. As one Kona fisherman put it: "It's not like we can't catch fish or that fresh fish is scarce—buyers and retailers have simply decided to buy foreign products, making it hard to find local buyers."

U.S. tuna landings, primarily from Hawai'i and excluding those used in canned tuna, are valued at \$170 million (Figure 1). In comparison, imports of fresh and frozen yellowfin and bigeye tuna were approximately \$230 million in 2023, reaching almost \$300 million in 2022 (Figure 2), with Vietnam, Panama and Indonesia being major sources.

U.S.-caught tuna is of superior quality, while many cheaper foreign imports use questionable practices.

In Hawai'i, bigeye and yellowfin tuna are primarily supplied to poke and sashimi markets, sold fresh and never chemically treated. However, imported tuna, often in the form of loins and cubes treated with carbon monoxide (referred to as "tailpipe tuna"), retains a misleadingly fresh appearance. According to a June 11, 2024, *Seafood Source* article, up to 60% of yellowfin tuna steaks from Vietnam undergo a process involving saline injections and treatments with beet juice, paprika and additives like sodium ascorbate and ascorbic acid.¹ This product is given a euphemism of "vitamin tuna" (from ascorbic acid), which is intended to mask low-quality, brown-colored fish.

'Ahi poke sold at major retailers in Hawai'i often displays a "locally made" label, despite being made from frozen fish treated with carbon monoxide. This misleading labeling equates it with fresh, locally caught Hawai'i product. Another popular grocery chain does not provide any source information on its 'ahi poke.



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STORY ICON KEY

REGIONAL INTEREST



CONSERVATION



FISHERMEN



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Hawai'i



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*Dedicated to ecosystem-based
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Council Addresses Unfair Trade and Problems

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Many of these imported products, particularly chemically treated ones, come from fisheries lacking the monitoring needed to ensure sustainability and fair labor practices. A significant source of these frozen fish is heavily subsidized Chinese fisheries. These subsidies create overcapacity and reduce operational costs, leading to lower prices that outcompete U.S. fisheries, which, unlike foreign counterparts, are not subsidized and are subject to strict laws like the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), and numerous labor regulations, in addition to the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Foreign fishery products entering the United States must meet similar marine mammal protection standards, yet enforcement remains lax.

Is the fish you are buying truly local?

Misleading labeling of seafood is a widespread issue in state and territorial markets, possibly due to insufficient enforcement and coordination between federal, state, and territorial authorities. Federal law requires country of origin labeling (COOL) for imported seafood and agricultural products until they are substantially transformed and/or processed. However, there is substantial gray area with 'ahi poke, which is often marketed as "locally made" or "freshly made" despite being imported, previously frozen and gas-treated. This misleads the consumer. The Council has recommended better coordination among state, territorial and federal agencies to enforce labeling laws, as has been done in states like Alabama, which requires clear labeling for all seafood products.²

The Council is pushing for investigations into dumping, countervailing and unfair trade harming U.S. Pacific tuna fisheries.

Council members, staff and industry leaders recently met with the International Trade Administration (ITA) to discuss these concerns. U.S. fishermen and industry leaders contend that foreign products are undercutting prices, possibly by "dumping" cheap, subsidized goods into the domestic market. Foreign governments subsidize industries by providing financial assistance to boost production, manufacturing, or exports. The level of subsidy a foreign fishery receives determines the rate of "countervailing" duties imposed to offset the subsidy. However, this practice harms U.S. fisheries by undercutting domestic prices.

According to the ITA, dumping occurs when a foreign producer sells a product in the United States below its home market price or production cost. This is different from simply having lower costs due to factors like lower wages. However, exceptions may apply for countries like China, where subsidies and economic conditions lower production costs. Consequently, the U.S. Department of Commerce considers Vietnam a "non-market economy," meaning its exports to the United States will be treated differently in antidumping and countervailing investigations, beyond just the production costs in Vietnam.³

The ITA may investigate these practices and request action by several agencies, which can trigger action by lawmakers. U.S. Pacific tuna industries can petition for investigations by providing data and evidence. If foreign entities are found to be engaging in unfair trade practices, duties could be imposed to mitigate the impact on U.S. fisheries.

The Council has long contended that MMPA import provisions should be enforced to ensure fairness and limit imports from questionable foreign fisheries. On Aug. 8, 2024, a group of environmental nongovernmental organizations filed suit against several federal departments for not enforcing these provisions,⁴ which aim to level the playing field by requiring foreign fisheries to meet the same standards as U.S. fisheries in reducing bycatch and protecting marine mammals.

The Council will continue to monitor petitions and investigations to ensure fair competition for U.S. Pacific fisheries. Progress on these issues will be discussed at the Council's 200th meeting in September. 🐟

References

¹Seafood Source, 2024. "Outcry grows over questionable 'vitamin tuna' treatment process." Cliff White, June 11, 2024.

²Seafood Source, 2024b. "Alabama governor signs seafood labeling bill into law." Nathan Strout, May 20, 2024.

³Seafood Source, 2024c. "US DOC maintains Vietnam's status as non-market economy, drawing domestic praise." Toan Dao, Aug. 6, 2024.

⁴The Fishing Daily, 2024. "Lawsuit Aims to Protect Marine Mammals, Enforce Seafood Import Bans." Oliver McBride, Aug. 12, 2024.

Figure 1. US Tuna Landings Value (US\$)

Source: Hawaii Longline Association

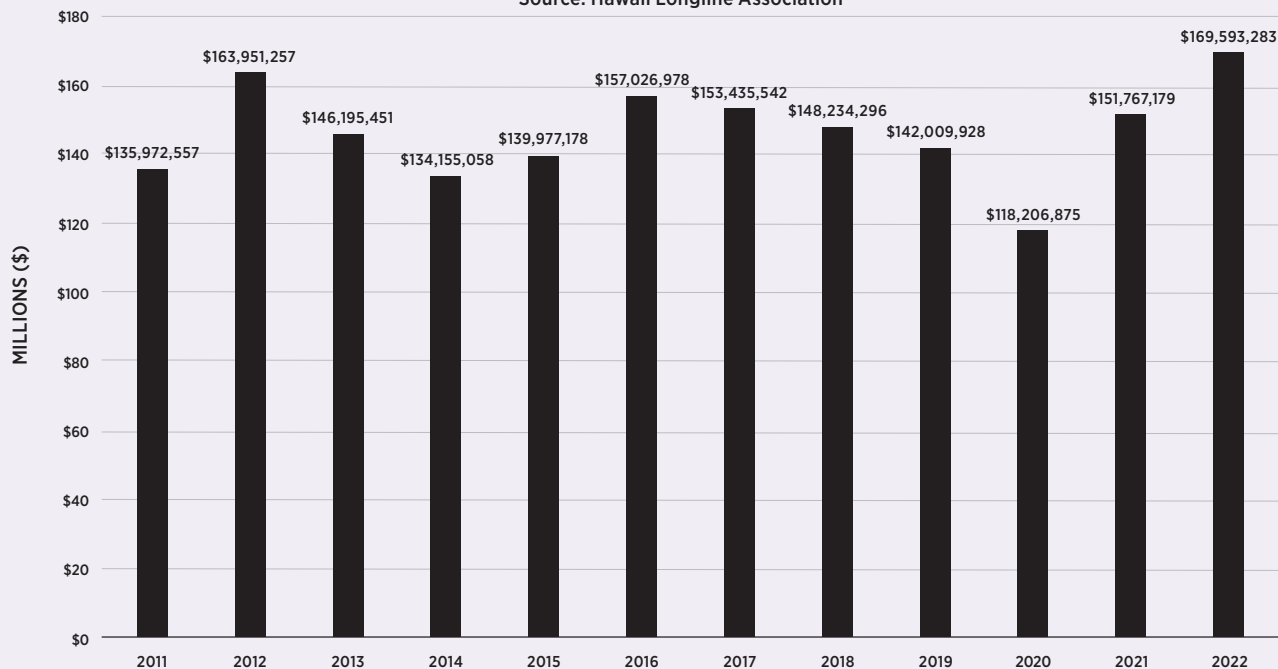
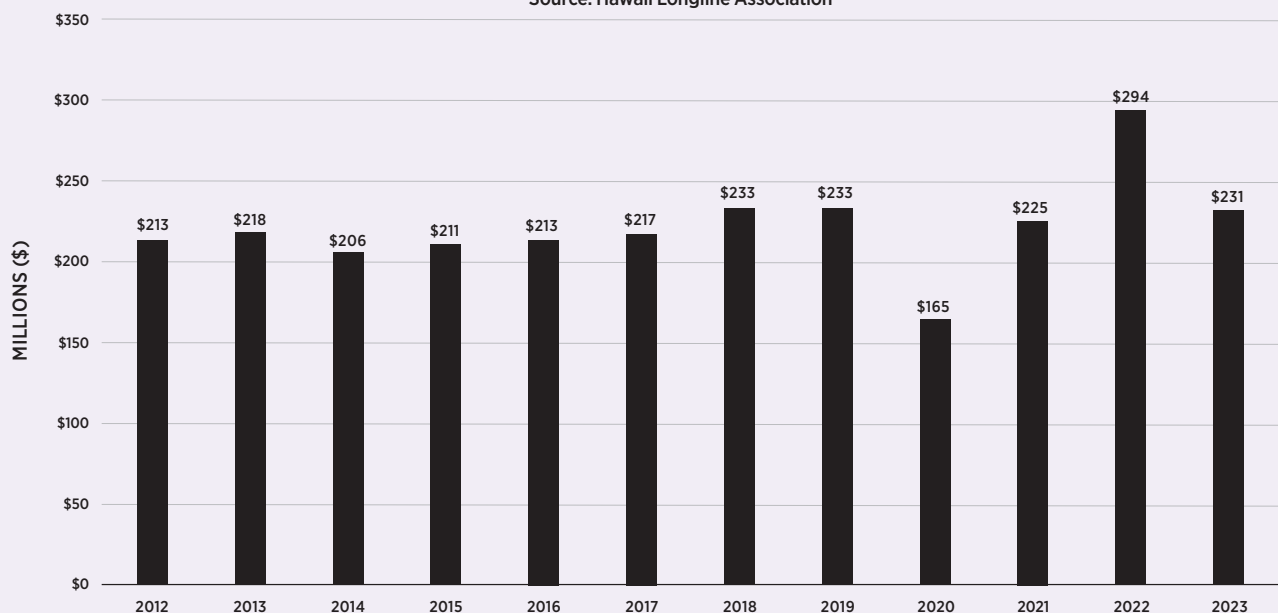


Figure 2. US Bigeye and Yellowfin Tuna Import Value (US\$)

Source: Hawaii Longline Association



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199th Council Meeting Highlights, June 24-26, 2024



Green sea turtle. Photo: Kino/Unsplash.

Cultural Uses for Green Sea Turtles

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council members from the U.S. Pacific Territories urged the federal government to consider the cultural uses of green sea turtles. For more than 4,000 years, the CHamoru and Refaluwasch people have used green sea turtles for medicinal, subsistence and cultural practices. However, the Endangered Species

Act (ESA) and the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) create barriers, despite a narrow subsistence exemption in the IAC.

The Council territory members recommended utilizing nurseries and involving community members to find innovative ways to recover the green sea turtle population. “The communities have a vested interest in raising healthy turtles if they are part of

the solution,” said Chelsa Muña, Guam Department of Agriculture director, pointing to successful examples of involving farmers to raise the endangered Ko’ko birds (Guam rail).

The Council requested that NOAA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) provide information on existing programs for green sea turtle nursery and rehabilitation to explore the potential for recovering the species.

Sanctuaries in the Pacific

In an “Island Voices” column published in the *Honolulu Star Advertiser* June 20, 2024, Council member Taotasi Archie Soliai, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources, pointed out inaccuracies about the territory’s economy that were used to support closing U.S. waters in the central equatorial Pacific to commercial fishing. Contrary to claims published April 28, 2024, titled “American Samoa deserves to thrive as fishing shifts,” American Samoa’s economy relies heavily on the tuna fishing and processing industry, with StarKist Samoa providing significant employment and economic stability.

At the Council meeting, Soliai said, “The Council’s spring newsletter included a commentary on the current situation of the Biden Administration’s proposed sanctuaries called ‘Justice? Or Just Us?’ The Administration continues to promote equity, but fails to extend the same considerations to its Pacific Territories. The United States can’t talk about promoting domestic industries, fishing, marketing, exporting, importing and food security but fail to act on its Strategy in the Pacific.”

Federal Consultation with Governors of US Territories Found Lacking

Council members expressed dismay with the continued problem of the lack of federal government consultation with territorial governments on ESA issues, including green sea turtles, giant

clams and oceanic whitetip sharks.

“The lack of consultation with the governors of the U.S. territories for federal initiatives shows disrespect—the Governors are our leaders and we look to them for guidance.” Guam Council member Judith Guthertz, former president of the University of Guam, expressed frustration with NOAA and USFWS not responding to the October 2023 letters from the U.S. Pacific Territorial Governors. These letters requested an extension of the comment period on the proposed designation of green sea turtle critical habitat. Affected communities need additional time to review the 800 pages of proposed rules and accompanying documentation.



Giant clam (Tridacna derasa) aquaculture in American Samoa. Photo: DMWR Fisheries.

Guthertz continued, “I teach values, governance and public administration at the University of Guam, but it is becoming harder for me to make the case to my students that we are valued by the U.S. government.”

The Council requested that NOAA and USFWS work with American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI governments to review the information underlying the proposed green sea turtle critical habitat designation before publishing the final rule.

With the lack of communication on the pending response to the giant clam ESA listing petition, Chelsea Muña, Guam Department of Agriculture director, said “[the rule] isn’t going to affect other countries, it affects us.” The National

Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) received a petition in 2016 to list 10 species of giant clams under the ESA, and announced in 2017 that seven of the 10 would undergo a full status review to determine if a listing was warranted. The findings were published July 25, 2024 (See “NMFS Proposes ESA Listing for 10 Giant Clam Species”), but were not communicated before that to the territorial agencies.

Pacific Islands communities, including U.S. island areas of American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI, have long-standing traditions of utilizing giant clams. Muña described giant clam aquaculture programs in Guam, which are set up as community-based management that helps empower the community to take responsibility and ownership.

Electronic Monitoring in Hawai‘i Longline Fisheries

In September 2023, the Council endorsed the development of an electronic monitoring (EM) pre-implementation plan aiming to enhance the sustainability and oversight of Hawai‘i longline fisheries. The primary objective of this EM program is to monitor protected species.

At the June 2024 meeting, the Council recommended further exploration of regulatory considerations to utilize EM to complement or fulfill data collection requirements as currently implemented by federal observers. This includes conducting a cost/benefit analysis, reviewing existing observer and logbook programs, and evaluating the relationship between EM and human observer coverage. With annual costs of at least \$2.4 million, \$15 million is needed to begin the program. 🐟

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“I teach values, governance and public administration at the University of Guam, but it is becoming harder for me to make the case to my students that we are valued by the U.S. government.”

**Judith Guthertz, former president
of the University of Guam**



Both *T. squamosa* (left) and *T. maxima* are proposed for listing as threatened due to their similar appearance. Photos: National Park Service of American Samoa.

NMFS Proposes ESA Listing for 10 Giant Clam Species

On July 25, 2024, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) proposed listing 10 giant clam species as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This proposal follows a 2016 petition. NMFS's status review suggests listing five species as endangered (*Hippopus porcellaneus*, *Tridacna derasa*, *T. gigas*, *T. mbalavuana* and *T. squamosina*), one as threatened (*H. hippopus*) and four more as threatened due to similarity in appearance (*T. crocea*, *T. maxima*, *T. noae* and *T. squamosa*). Public comments are open until Oct. 23, 2024, and NMFS announced in-person listening sessions and public hearings in American Samoa,

CNMI and Guam between September 4 and 19. If adopted, the rule will prohibit the take of the five endangered species and the one threatened species. For the four species listed due to similarity in appearance, NMFS proposes banning the import and export of their parts or products.

According to NMFS's status review, several giant clam species are native to American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands but are now rare or extirpated due to overexploitation. Each jurisdiction has undertaken efforts to reintroduce or culture giant clams to rebuild populations and provide a food source for local communities.

In 2023, American Samoa received 500 giant clams (*T. derasa*) as a gift from the neighboring Samoan government, as part of the Atoa-o-Samoa Talks held the same year. The clams signified the exchange of food security methods and expertise between the fishery management divisions of the two Samoas. Guam also has an active project to establish village-owned clam farms, with clams supplied from Palau (*T. maxima*).

For more information on the proposed rule, supporting documents and instructions on providing public comment, visit the NMFS website at: www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/proposed-rule-10-species-giant-clams-under-endangered-species-act. 🐟



Photo: American Samoa Dept. of Marine and Wildlife Resources.

Public Comments Sought on NMFS Rule to Ban Take of Threatened Oceanic Whitetip Sharks

On May 14, 2024, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) proposed protective regulations under section 4(d) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to conserve the threatened oceanic whitetip shark. The rule would prohibit the “take” of these sharks, including incidental interactions, with limited exceptions for scientific research and law enforcement. Under the ESA, prohibitions listed under section 9(a)(1) of the ESA automatically apply when a species is listed as endangered, but not threatened.

Following a Council recommendation from its 199th meeting in June 2024 and a request from the State of Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources, NMFS extended the public comment period on the proposed rule until Sept. 15, 2024. NMFS also held an in-person public hearing in Kailua-Kona, Hawai‘i Aug. 20, 2024, and a virtual hearing August 21.

NMFS invites comments, information, and recommendations on the proposed rule, which may be revised based on public input and in light of the biological status, conservation needs and threats to the species.

The proposed rule exempts incidental interactions in federally managed fisheries, such as the Hawai‘i and American Samoa longline fisheries, and bottomfish fisheries in Hawai‘i, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), from the take prohibitions under existing ESA Section 7 consultations.

At the public hearing in Kona, fishermen voiced concerns about the inclusion of incidental interactions in the proposed prohibitions and how enforcement would apply if an oceanic whitetip shark was accidentally caught. NMFS staff clarified that enforcement would be at the discretion of law enforcement officers and that pursuing cases where fishermen are doing the right thing is not a priority for the agency. In response, fishermen asked NMFS to revise the language to ensure that unintentional interactions, where the shark is released in good condition, would not violate the take prohibitions.

However, incidental interactions would be considered prohibited take in small-scale pelagic fisheries (e.g., troll and handline fisheries) in Hawai‘i, American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI, which are mainly managed by state or territorial agencies and comprise a mix of commercial and noncommercial fishers.

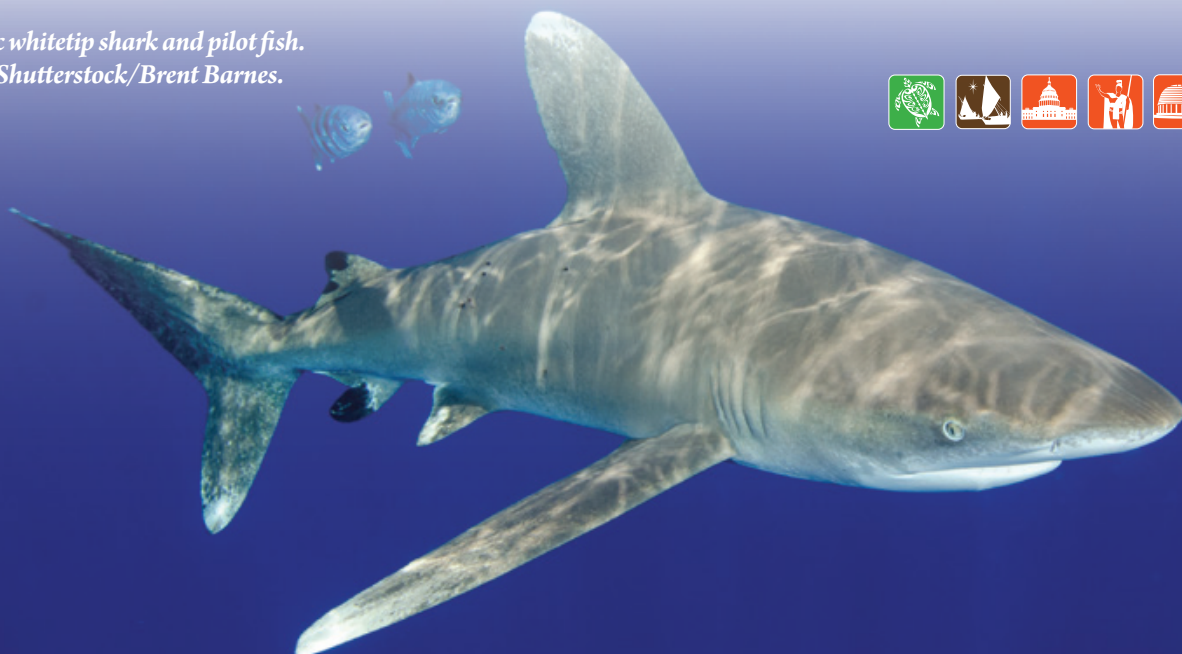
Oceanic whitetip sharks have been listed as threatened under the ESA since 2018. NMFS identifies the primary threats to the species as incidental bycatch in commercial fisheries (particularly pelagic longlines, purse seines and gillnets), international trade in shark fins, and inadequate regulatory mechanisms (management) to address these threats. Under the ESA, “take” includes actions such as is defined as harassing, harming, pursuing, hunting, shooting, wounding, killing, trapping, capturing or collecting, as well as accidental hookings or entanglements in commercial or recreational fisheries.

For more information on the proposed rule and supporting documents (including a draft Environmental Assessment), and to submit comments, visit: www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/proposed-protective-regulations-oceanic-whitetip-shark.



Oceanic whitetip shark and pilot fish.

Photo: Shutterstock/Brent Barnes.



Reconnecting with Hawai'i's Small-Boat Fishing Community: Tackling Challenges and Building Trust



At the 192nd meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council in September 2022, Roy Morioka, a dedicated local Hawai'i fisherman, passionately urged fishery managers and scientists to enhance their monitoring and management practices. His presentation highlighted several challenges, including the prevalent "ainokea" attitude, and emphasized the need for science-based standards and improved data collection to better understand Hawai'i's small-boat fisheries.

Thanks to support from the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC), Morioka successfully gathered a diverse group of stakeholders, comprising small-boat fishers, federal and state managers, scientists and enforcement officials. Together, they hosted eight public meetings April 23 to May 9, 2024, across Hawai'i on O'ahu, Kaua'i, Moloka'i, Hawai'i Island and Maui. These meetings aimed to re-engage the fishing community and provide a platform for dialogue and collaboration.

Each meeting included outreach tables from various agencies and organizations, such as the Council and its Advisory Panel, Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) and Division of Conservation and Resource Enforcement (DOCARE), the NOAA PIFSC and Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO), Pacific Islands Fisheries Group, Hawai'i Fishermen's Alliance for Conservation and Tradition (HFACT), Poseidon Fisheries Research, Hawai'i Pacific University Marine Debris Program and the University of Hawai'i Cooperative Fisheries Research Unit. These booths offered insights into the organization's role and how fishing communities can get involved in fisheries management.

Following the booth presentations, participants engaged in an interactive Kahoot! quiz activity that featured a word cloud element. This activity revealed that "food" was the most common association with fishing, underscoring its critical role in community sustenance.

The meetings were designed to foster open dialogue, with seating arranged in a circle to emphasize collaboration rather than a lecture. Several recurring themes emerged across the different locations:

- **Building Trust:** Participants stressed the importance of establishing relationships between scientists/agencies and the fishing community. Trust can be built through consistent engagement and feedback on how fishers' contributions are utilized. Many fishers indicated a willingness to share data if there were clear benefits or incentives.
- **Incentives for Data Collection:** There was a consensus that incentives are crucial for encouraging data submission. Suggestions ranged from financial rewards to lottery-style incentives, highlighting the clear need for some form of compensation.

The meetings marked the beginning of a renewed effort to address the concerns of Hawai'i's small-boat fisheries. Moving forward, the small-boat working group plans to use the information from these meetings to focus on the identified issues, continue to build trust and start to address the ainokea attitude. 🐟

REGIONAL CONCERNS: Each island had unique issues:

O'ahu: Discussions focused on the balance between federal requirements for the best scientific information and cultural practices, as well as the need for more data on imported seafood and noncommercial fishing.

Kaua'i: Participants highlighted issues with access, including protected species closures and privatization of access points. They also discussed the need for a cultural take on green sea turtles and concerns about Hawaiian monk seals.

Moloka'i: Key issues included the short lifespan and poor placement of fish aggregating devices (FADs) and perceived inequities in resource allocation.

Hawai'i Island: Participants stressed the importance of understanding ecosystem impacts, improving infrastructure and better aligning scientific research with fishing practices.

Maui: Attendees focused on the benefits of data collection for fishers and emphasized the importance of scientists observing fisheries in action to better understand and interpret the data. There were also concerns about the decline of full-time fisheries and the loss of cultural values.





2023 Pacific Islands Fisheries Reports Unveil Trends, Describe New Assessments and Explore Updates for Future Reports

In early July, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council published its 2023 Annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) reports. These five reports offer detailed summaries of fisheries in Hawai'i, American Samoa and Mariana Archipelagos, Pacific Remote Island Areas and Pacific Pelagic region. The reports are a collaborative effort involving the Council, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources, Guam Department of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Division of Fish and Wildlife. Each agency contributes to the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plan Teams, which oversee the creation and updating of these documents.

The SAFE reports go beyond just catch data, incorporating a broad range of information relevant to U.S. Pacific Island fisheries. This includes summaries of fishery performance, annual catch limit (ACL) monitoring, new stock assessment results, and administrative and regulatory actions. They also feature a chapter on ecosystem information pertinent to fisheries, such as changes in climate and oceanic variables, socioeconomic trends and protected species interactions and management. The Council, its advisory bodies, its partners and the public use this comprehensive information to make informed management decisions, ensuring sustainable fish populations and a steady supply of local fish for residents.

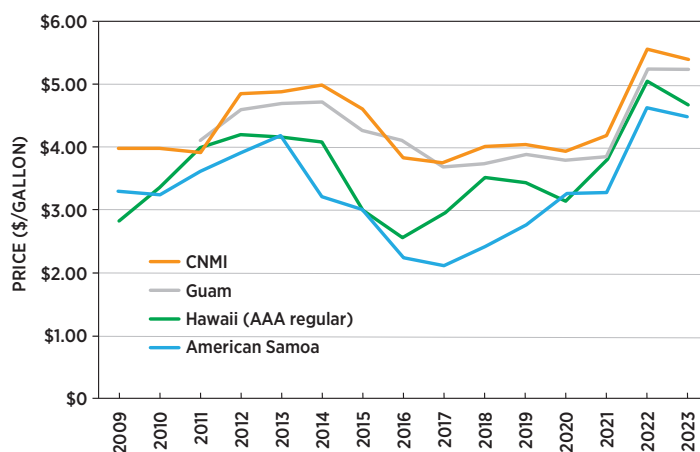
Stock assessments are a key tool for sustainable fisheries management. These assessments evaluate the impact of fishing and other ocean environment factors on fish populations. Scientists use data on catch numbers, fish biology and abundance to create models that estimate the current status of fish stocks and predict future trends. This helps fishery managers set sustainable ACLs and guide management decisions, balancing industry and community needs with ecosystem health. The SAFE reports provide the latest stock assessment updates, including new methodologies and outcomes.

Overfished: When a fish stock's population size is too low, jeopardizing the stock's ability to reproduce and replenish itself.

Overfishing: When fish from a stock are being caught at a rate higher than the population can sustain, leading to a decline in productivity.

Figure 3. Average Unleaded Fuel Price in the Western Pacific Region (US\$)

Source: PIFSC Social-Ecological and Economic Systems (SEES) Program



Out With the Old, In With the New

In recent years, the NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) has improved stock assessments for federally managed species in the U.S. Pacific Islands. While many assessments showed positive trends, some fisheries faced challenges. In 2019, PIFSC's Stock Assessment Program (SAP) used a state-space Bayesian surplus production model to evaluate bottomfish fisheries in American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI.¹

The results for Guam and American Samoa were constrained by the poor quality of fishery data at the time. Data were generally not available for individual species, except from commercial landings. Since then, PIFSC has adapted a more species-specific approach for American Samoa's stock assessment. They are also working to improve

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data availability for a more robust assessment of Guam's bottomfish fisheries in the future.

In 2023, PIFSC conducted a new benchmark stock assessment for American Samoa bottomfish² using data from historical reports, recent boat and shore-based creel surveys, length composition from both boat-based creel and biosampling, and an abundance index from creel interviews. This assessment marked a departure from previous methods by evaluating nine of the 11 federally managed bottomfish species individually rather than as a group. PIFSC scientists used an age-structured model within the Stock Synthesis 3.30 framework. The findings indicated that these nine species are neither overfished nor subject to overfishing. Following the assessment, the Council started working with NMFS to end the bottomfish rebuilding plan and establish new, species-specific ACLs. A stock assessment update is planned for 2026.

In 2024, PIFSC updated the stock assessment for Guam bottomfish,³ covering 13 species of snapper, grouper, jacks and emperors as a single complex due to data limitations. The update used a state-space Bayesian surplus production model within the JABBA framework, incorporating biological and fishery-dependent data up to 2023. The assessment found that the federally managed bottomfish complex is no longer overfished and not subject to overfishing, though it has not yet fully rebuilt. Based on these results, the Council may recommend changes to the rebuilding plan, including higher annual harvest levels or changing federal fishing restrictions if catch levels are exceeded. PIFSC SAP is working toward a more detailed, potentially species-specific assessment for Guam, evaluating available data to see if it supports more focused assessments of federally managed bottomfish species in the region.

These new stock assessments by PIFSC represent upgrades from previous evaluations. These cutting-edge assessments offer a more accurate understanding of bottomfish populations, supporting sustainable fishing practices and a cooperative approach to fisheries management. Community involvement has been elevated to be a key component in the assessment process, ensuring that local knowledge and stakeholder input are integrated appropriately.

Key Trends in Fishery Performance

Stock assessments provide detailed snapshots of regional fisheries' status every few years using statistical models and available data. In contrast, the Council's annual SAFE reports offer yearly summaries of fishery performance to help managers monitor trends between assessments. The data tables show the percent change in fish catch and revenue across the U.S. Pacific Islands from 2022 to 2023, highlighting how variable they can be from year to year.

PELAGIC

In the U.S. Pacific Islands, pelagic (i.e., open ocean) fisheries

are the largest managed by the Council in terms of catch and revenue. These fisheries include species like tunas and billfishes caught by longlining, trolling and handlining. **Table 1** shows catch, revenue and percent changes for these major fisheries from 2022 to 2023.

Hawai'i

In Hawai'i, pelagic fisheries generally saw declines in 2023 after increases in 2022. The one exception was the deep-set longline fishery, targeting bigeye tuna, which accounted for more than 85% of the State's pelagic landings. Despite decreases in bigeye tuna, the deep-set fishery's increases in yellowfin and albacore tuna compensated for reduced supply of its primary target.

Bigeye tuna catches have been declining since 2015, while yellowfin catches have slowly risen. However, a drop in average fish price from \$4.80/pound to \$4.23/pound led to a substantial reduction in revenue for Hawai'i's pelagic fisheries. The shallow-set longline fishery, focusing on swordfish, remained operational for the full fishing season in 2023, but saw declines in catch and revenue. Decreases were also observed in swordfish, blue marlin, spearfish and striped marlin, further impacted by a \$0.77/pound drop in average fish price, resulting in more than \$3.1 million in lost revenue. Small-boat (i.e., non-longline) pelagic fisheries faced even greater declines in catch and revenue, potentially due to competition from foreign imports and preservation challenges.

American Samoa

In American Samoa, the longline fishery had 10 active vessels in 2023, down from 11 in 2022. After two years of catch increases post-COVID-19, the fishery saw decreases in longline sets and total landings, dropping from 3.17 million pounds to 2.69 million pounds. Despite increases in skipjack, bigeye and yellowfin tuna, the main target—albacore—declined by nearly 600,000 pounds. Catch rates for albacore fell to 12.6 fish per 1,000 hooks, below the "break even" point for profitability in the fishery, compared to more than 14 fish per 1,000 hooks the previous year.

In the American Samoa troll fishery, a significant increase in fishing effort did not translate to higher total catch, which remained consistent with the previous year. The Council and its Plan Team are working to improve data accuracy for this fishery. Revenue trends are not reported due to fewer than three dealers providing commercial sales data in 2022, which is kept confidential to protect personal information.

Guam

In 2023, the pelagic troll fisheries of the Mariana Archipelago showed contrasting trends. Guam saw an increase in total estimated catch despite recovery from Super Typhoon Mawar, continuing a fluctuating pattern over the past decade. Tuna catches, particularly skipjack and yellowfin, were strong, but key non-tuna species like ono and mahimahi declined. Revenue information for Guam's troll fishery is not reported due to data confidentiality.

CNMI

Conversely, the CNMI troll fishery experienced a significant decline in both catch and revenue, with around a 47% decrease from 2022. However, the data presented here do not tell the whole story. Sampling issues, delays in commercial data collection, and problems with funding and staff turnover at the CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife led to gaps in data. Additionally, not all commercial invoices for 2023 were accounted for by the time of the SAFE report's publication.

Table 1. 2023 catch and revenue for Western Pacific Region pelagic fisheries

Island Area	Fishery	2023		% Change from 2022	
		Catch (lbs)	Revenue (\$)	Catch	Revenue
Hawai'i	Deep-set longline	25,656,742	100,554,758	+5.8	-8.3
	Shallow-set longline	1,597,421	6,829,282	-14.8	-31.6
	Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) troll	1,596,003	5,987,767	-10.0	-16.3
	MHI handline	571,402	2,634,381	-40.3	-37.0
	Offshore handline	347,991	1,310,329	-39.1	-25.9
	Other gears	191,214	756,036	-38.5	-32.6
	TOTAL	29,960,774	118,072,554	+0.7	-11.8
American Samoa	Longline	2,688,109	2,823,131	-15.3	-32.1
	Troll	4,586	10,469	+2.9	-
	TOTAL	2,692,735	2,833,600	-15.3	-
CNMI	Troll	126,493	365,865	-46.7	-47.3
Guam	Troll	718,342	n.d.	+13.7	-

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

BOTTOMFISH

Nearshore fisheries in the U.S. Pacific Islands are smaller compared to pelagic fisheries, but are an important facet for local communities economically, culturally and socially. Table 2 shows bottomfish catch, revenue and percent change from 2022 to 2023. Increases in catch were noted for Hawai'i's Deep 7 and American Samoa bottomfish, though both fisheries have been in a general decline since 2014 and 2015, respectively. For Hawai'i's Deep 7, factors such as challenging weather, increasing shark depredation, declining fisher participation and impacts from the pandemic on the local hospitality sector are likely contributing to this trend. In American Samoa, the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have affected fishing effort, despite the 2023 increase.

In 2023, Hawai'i's uku fishery saw decreases in both catch and revenue, with commercial uku catch hitting an all-time low, though revenue was not impacted to the same extent due to average price per pound remaining strong. Continued issues with shark depredation during summertime uku spawning runs at Penguin Bank, on top of other issues similarly plaguing the Deep 7 fishery, have likely caused fishers to pivot to higher-value species to capitalize on exceptional post-COVID

prices. Guam's bottomfish fishery also declined, possibly due to interannual variability and the damage caused by Super Typhoon Mawar in May 2023. The storm damaged important fishing infrastructure, including the Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association, which did not begin resuming operations through the end of the year. For the CNMI, similar to pelagics, decreased performance data are partly due to sampling issues and delays in commercial data collection.

Table 2. 2023 catch and revenue for Western Pacific bottomfish fisheries

Island Area	Fishery	2023		% Change from 2022	
		Catch (lbs)	Revenue (\$)	Catch	Revenue
Hawai'i	Deep 7 bottomfish stock complex	197,158	1,804,571	+4.2	+7.3
	Uku (gray jobfish)	45,012	302,228	-15.0	-11.5
American Samoa	Bottomfish	4,879	n.d.	+213.4	-
CNMI	Bottomfish	10,178	28,589	-78.5	-84.2
Guam	Bottomfish	25,713	n.d.	-23.2	-

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

ANNUAL CATCH LIMITS

The Council manages non-pelagic fisheries, including bottomfish, using ACLs to prevent overfishing. Typically, a three-year running average of catch is compared to the ACL to account for variability in data from creel surveys. These ACLs are detailed in the annual SAFE reports, along with catch estimates. In Hawai'i, ACLs apply to bottomfish, crustaceans, and precious corals, while American Samoa and the Mariana Archipelagos have ACLs for bottomfish only. Although ACLs were previously set for more species, many were reclassified from management unit species (MUS) to ecosystem component species (ECS) in 2019, meaning they are now monitored rather than actively managed. In 2023, none of the ACLs were exceeded (see Table 3) though catch data for Hawai'i precious corals remain confidential.

Table 3. ACLs for Western Pacific MUS compared to 2023 catch values The ACLs for American Samoa and Guam

Island Area	Fishery	MUS	ACL (lbs)	2023 Catch (lbs)	Portion of ACL caught (%)
Hawai'i	Bottomfish	Deep 7 bottomfish	492,000	197,158	40.1
		Uku (gray jobfish)	295,419	247,381	83.7
	Crustacean	Deep-water shrimp	250,773	24,710	9.9
		Kona crab	30,802	4,879	15.8
American Samoa	Bottomfish	Bottomfish	5,000	4,689	93.8
CNMI	Bottomfish	Bottomfish	84,000	10,178	12.1
Guam	Bottomfish	Bottomfish	31,000	25,713	-

Note: All Hawai'i catch values are from commercial data except for uku, which includes Hawai'i Marine Recreational Fishing Survey data estimates that are known to have high uncertainty. The ACLs for American Samoa and Guam bottomfish are part of rebuilding plans for the fisheries after a prior stock assessment (Langseth et al. 2019) found both fisheries to previously be overfished, with the American Samoa bottomfish fishery also experiencing overfishing. More recent stock assessments for American Samoa (Nadon et al. 2023) and Guam (Bohabor and Matthews 2024) indicate neither fishery to be overfished nor experiencing overfishing, and adjustments to the rebuilding plans are ongoing.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

The Hawai'i deep-set longline fishery, targeting bigeye tuna, accounts for more than 85% of the State's pelagic landings. The longline fleet has about 150 active vessels.



2023 Pacific Islands Fisheries Reports

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11



A new benchmark stock assessment in American Samoa found that nine of 11 federally managed species of bottomfish are neither overfished nor subject to overfishing. At the end of 2023, the Council recommended new species-specific ACLs and discontinuing the rebuilding plan.

Photo. Peter Gurr Sr.

while the bottomfish stock complex is no longer overfished, it has yet to fully rebuild, so the rebuilding plan remains in place. The Council is exploring ways to increase the allowable annual harvest for Guam bottomfish fishers under this plan.

Improvements Going Forward

In 2023, the Council and its Plan Teams made significant progress on improving the annual SAFE reports and the data they present. Efforts included evaluating new turtle interaction limits for Hawai'i's shallow set longline fishery, creating a style guide for updating annual data summaries, and developing timelines for changes in fishery regulations and data collection. The Council also approved territorial noncommercial data modules for nearshore species and plans to develop similar summaries for pelagic species in 2024. However, concerns about the representativeness of data from the Hawai'i Marine Recreational Fishing Survey (HMRFS) led to deferring the inclusion of noncommercial data summaries for Hawai'i.

bottomfish are still based on the Council's rebuilding plans, which aim to allow stocks to recover while permitting continued fishing. At the end of 2023, the Council recommended new species-specific ACLs for American Samoa's bottomfish and discontinuing the rebuilding plan, though these changes were still in process at the time of publication. For Guam,

For the 2024 reports, the Council plans to restructure American Samoa's fishery performance data section to present information by individual species, aligning with the new NMFS stock assessment and Council-recommended ACLs. Other anticipated improvements include updated CNMI fishery data, a revised marine planning module, new climate and oceanic indicators, and research on the impacts of weather on fishing effort. Changes such as El Niño can affect the productivity of marine ecosystems and catchability of managed fish stocks.

As the Council marks the tenth anniversary of the current format of the SAFE reports, it plans to convene working groups to evaluate and potentially overhaul the reports. Future initiatives may include incorporating longer time series of data, providing historical context, and integrating fishery performance data with climate indicators. The Council is also exploring the automation of report updates to streamline the process.

Full reports are available on the Council's website at www.wpcouncil.org/annual-reports. Select content will soon be available through the Council's online portal (www.wpcouncildata.org), which offers easy navigation and data downloads. New this year is a pelagic socioeconomics section, and a comprehensive review of the online portal is planned to enhance its framework and content. 🐟

References:

- ¹Langseth B, Syslo J, Yau A, Carvalho F. 2019. Stock assessments of the bottomfish management unit species of Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa, 2019. NOAA Tech Memo. NMFS-PIFSC-86.
- ²Nadon MO, Oshima M, Bohaboy E, Carvalho F. 2023. Stock Assessment of American Samoa Bottomfishes, 2023. NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-PIFSC-143.
- ³Bohaboy and Matthews. In prep. Stock Assessment Update of the Bottomfish Management Unit Species of Guam, 2024.

Advancing Climate Resilience in Hawai'i: More Than \$88 Million for Local Communities



Transformative funding initiatives have brought a combined \$88.5 million to enhance climate resilience across the Hawaiian Islands. The University of Hawai'i Sea Grant, Kua'āina Ulu 'Auamo (KUA) and the State of Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) have received \$68.5 million to revitalize the traditional moku system and bolster community resilience. Additionally, President Biden's "Investing in America" agenda has allocated \$20 million through the Kapapahulau Climate Resilience Program to support 17 Native Hawaiian Organizations in restoring native ecosystems and integrating indigenous knowledge and practices. These efforts aim to protect coastal communities from the adverse effects of extreme weather and climate change.

The UH Sea Grant, KUA and DLNR hope to reinvigorate the traditional moku system and create a resilient future for the islands through partnerships with various organizations. This collaboration will focus on several key areas:

- **Conserving and Restoring Forests and Watersheds:** Removing invasive species, managing invasive mammal populations and building local capacity.
- **Enhancing Regional Community-Based Coastal Stewardship:** Restoring natural infrastructure that act as a buffer against climate and weather hazards.

- **Restoring Marine Abundance:** Restoring critical food systems, including fishponds and coral reefs.
- **Sharing Knowledge and Strengthening Networks Across Communities:** Facilitating knowledge exchange across networks of community organizations and practitioners.
- **Reducing Risk and Improving Disaster Resilience:** Supporting risk reduction through green infrastructure and capacity-building.
- **Advancing Community Governance:** Implementing governance models that address historical power imbalances and increasing capacity for equitable community-government collaborations.

The funding for this project, which comes from the \$575 million Climate Resilience Regional Challenge under the Inflation Reduction Act, will support activities across five moku, one on each of the islands of Kaua'i, O'ahu, Moloka'i, Maui and Hawai'i. For more details, refer to the project summary.¹

The Kapapahulau Climate Resilience Program, part of the U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of Native Hawaiian Relations, aims to "enhance the ability of the Native Hawaiian Community to navigate the effects of climate change in ways that maintain the integrity and identity of the Native Hawaiian people."

Coping, adaptation and transformation are the three priorities for program funds, which have been awarded across O'ahu, Hawai'i, Maui, Kaua'i and Moloka'i.

Projects under this program include ecosystem restoration, community-based economic development, mapping sea level rise and other activities that seek to both address climate challenges and strengthen cultural and community engagement.

These initiatives resonate with the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council's longstanding commitment to traditional governance, as demonstrated by the Puwalu conferences with lawai'a (fishermen) and mahi'ai (farmers) since 2006. By embedding generational wisdom into modern marine fishery management and other critical areas, these efforts honor local expertise while tackling contemporary climate issues. For further details on the projects and awardees, visit the program's website² and learn more about the collaborative actions aimed at fostering a resilient and sustainable Hawaiian Islands. ➡

References:

¹ https://coast.noaa.gov/data/coasthome/funding/_pdf/crrc-awards-hawaii.pdf

² www.doi.gov/doi.gov/hawaiian/climate-resilience/2024-Kapapahulau-Recipients

Below: One funded project is for Paepae o He'eia and Kāko'o Ōiwi to employ indigenous Hawaiian aquacultural and agricultural management strategies and solutions to address and mitigate climate change-related challenges in He'eia, O'ahu. Source: <https://paepaeoheeia.org>





Guam Fishermen's Co-op Reopens!

After more than 14 months of closure following the destruction of its facility in May 2023, the Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Co-op) has reopened in a temporary facility. Located near the original site, the new facility is housed in 40-foot containers elevated to meet flood zone requirements. The Co-op is fully operational, offering fresh reef fish, tuna, marlin, wahoo, mahi-mahi loins and fillets, ice and other essentials for fishermen.

Co-op President Manny Dueñas could not be happier, noting that customers began visiting the retail store even before the doors were officially opened on June 15, 2024. "Customers wanted fish platters for the weekend. And our tourist customers, who made up 35-45% of sales before Typhoon Mawar, are coming back." Dueñas added that Korean visitors currently account for 15% of the customer base and the number is steadily increasing.

"The Co-op is more than just a store; it's a gathering place where the community feels like family," said Dueñas.

Biba Peskadot! 🐟

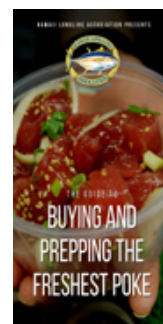
Top: A customer inspects the fresh catches of the day. Bottom left: Guam Fishermen's Co-op President Manny Dueñas fillets fish in preparation for the temporary facility reopening on June 15, 2024. Bottom right: Installing the new Guam Co-op sign.



Recipe: Spicy 'Ahi Poke

Courtesy Hawaii Longline Association

For a guide to buying and prepping the freshest poke, visit www.hawaiilongline.org.



Ingredients

- 1 lb fresh cubed 'ahi (tuna)
- 2 tbsp sesame oil
- 2 tbsp shoyu (soy sauce)
- 3 tbsp mayo
- 1 tsp minced garlic
- 2 tbsp sriracha
- ¼ cup green onion
- 1 tsp Hawaiian sea salt



New Research Boat Launched at Malaloa Marina in American Samoa

American Samoa's Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) launched a new research vessel, the R/V *Puna'oaolevasa*, July 2, 2024. The christening ceremony took place at the Malaloa Marina Dock,



marking an exciting step forward for local marine research and conservation. The R/V *Puna'oaolevasa*, which translates to "the wealth of the ocean," was built locally by Industrial Gases Ltd., led by Peter Crispin and Andy Wearing. The new double-hull aluminum boat is 32 feet long and 12 feet wide, with a catamaran-style design and is powered by



Lt. Governor La'apui Ale (left) helped to christen the R/V Puna'oaolevasa July 2, 2024, with DMWR Director Taotasi Archie Soliai (middle) and others.

twin Mercury Verado outboard engines. The boat is equipped with Garmin Chartplotters for navigation, radars, marine autopilots and searchlights, and can seat up to six people, making it perfect for research teams.

This new vessel will help enhance the department's ability to monitor and protect the ocean's resources around American Samoa. The boat and its trailer cost \$372,000 and took approximately six months to build with funding provided by the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program. Lt. Governor La'apui Talauega Ale commended DMWR and everyone involved in the construction on an incredible milestone, noting the

government's priorities to acquire assets and infrastructure that will assist in performing the responsibilities of the people of American Samoa.

DMWR Director Taotasi Archie Soliai said, "The *Puna'oaolevasa* is more than just a vessel; it was a critical tool to enable DMWR to fulfill our mandated objectives. This vessel will greatly assist in conducting essential research, performing surveys and monitoring fish aggregating devices and marine protected areas." With this new boat, DMWR's capacity to collect data has been significantly enhanced, enabling more effective study and protection of marine life. 🐟

Source: Pacific Island Times.

Pacific Islands Forum Welcomes Two New Associate Members

American Samoa and Guam have been accepted as associate members of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), changing their status from observers. This was decided at the 53rd PIF Leaders Meeting held August 26 to 30, 2024, in Nuku'alofa, Tonga. The U.S. Pacific Territories can now participate in high-level discussions on key issues facing the region, such as the environment and fisheries management, but are not voting members.

A political and economic policy organization, the PIF was established in 1971 and brings together countries and territories in the Pacific region to foster cooperation, dialogue, and collective action on regional issues. Its membership includes 18 north and south Pacific island countries. 🐟

Saipan Fishermen's Association Celebrates 40 Years with a Memorable Tournament



Grand prize winners Only Reelz, Captain Aaron Benavente (right) and crew Jesse Ramon, with their 211-pound marlin. Photo: Floyd Masga.

In a celebration of dedication and maritime tradition, the Saipan Fishermen's Association (SFA) marked a significant milestone with its 40th Annual Saipan International Fishing Tournament. Held at the Smiling Cove Marina July 13-14, 2024, this prestigious event drew participants from across the region and beyond, solidifying its status as a cornerstone of the fishing community.

The Council organized an outreach table at the tournament, sharing information about the Council process



and the U.S. Pacific Territories Fishery Capacity-Building Scholarship, and engaging attendees with questions on a Spin the Wheel game.



Founded in 1984 by seven passionate individuals—Frank Aldan, John San Nicolas, Dave Price, Arnold Palacios, Ben Sablan, Marty Taylor and Norman Tenorio—the SFA has grown from its modest beginnings to a vibrant organization with 15 active members. The association, renowned for its annual tournaments, has become a hub for recreational and sportfishing enthusiasts.

Tony Scragg, SFA President and a member for 24 years, reflects on the tournament's success with pride. “The 40th Annual Saipan International Fishing Tournament's success was due to the collective effort of our entire organization,” Scragg said. “Everyone has a role to fill and they all do their part. The SFA is really like a family and everyone chips in to accomplish our common goal. I may currently fill the role as president, but it is the folks under me that really make things happen.”

The 2024 tournament saw a remarkable turnout, with 91 vessels registered (close to the record of 101), including 66

from Saipan, 6 from Tinian and 19 from Guam, along with crews from the mainland and other countries. The event lived up to its reputation, attracting families and friends from neighboring islands, the mainland and abroad.

In a competitive display of skill, the tournament featured several categories. In the Billfish Category, the Grand Prize went to team *Only Reelz* with a marlin weighing 211 pounds. Following closely were *Le'Ana Vae* (152.2 pounds), *Defiance* (132.5 pounds) and *Sweet Candy* (130.0 pounds). For the Total Weight Category, *Hello Fishy* took the top spot with a combined weight of 319.4 pounds from three marlins.

The Yellowfin Category saw *Chang* in first place with a 59.2-pound catch, followed by *Carmelita II* (46.9 pounds) and *Emmanuel* (45.6 pounds). In the Skipjack Category, *Chang* also claimed first place with a 16.1-pound fish, while *St. Jude* (14.6 pounds) and *Amber Marie* (14.0 pounds) secured the next spots. The Wahoo Category was dominated by *Papa San* with a 35.5-pound catch, followed by *Saigon Girl* (26.5 pounds) and *My Princess Jasmine* (24.9 pounds). In the Mahi Mahi Category, *Amber Marie* took first place with a 23.9-pound fish, and *Hello Fishy* followed with a 10.4-pound catch.

Sixty-six qualifying catches were weighed over the two-day event, with notable totals including 62 billfish at approximately 4,915.9 pounds, 25 wahoo at 419.7 pounds, 60 skipjack at 572.6 pounds, 16 yellowfin at 453.1 pounds and 3 mahi mahi at 53.6 pounds. The dynamic competition saw team *Amber Marie* (from Guam) take first place in the Mahi Mahi Category and secured second place in another category, a testament to their skill and versatility.

Participation recognitions given to derby winners included Council outreach materials, hats, lunar calendars, canvas bags and coolers.

For more updates on the Saipan Fishermen's Association and future tournaments, visit www.sfa-saipan.org. 🐟

Vessels leaving the Smiling Cove Marina at the commencement of the 40th Annual Saipan International Fishing Tournament.



As summer heats up, so does the political climate, as Congress marches towards the November elections. With only a few months left of the 118th Congress, all eyes are on Washington D.C. to see what legislation will be introduced and passed before time is up. As Congress continues to deal with budgets and foreign policy, legislative fishery actions may start getting some notice as well.

In the House of Representatives, Rep. Jared Huffman (D-CA) introduced the Sustaining America's Fisheries for the Future Act of 2024, H.R. 8862. Co-sponsored by Reps James Moylan (R-GU), Ed Case (D-HI) and Mary Peltola (D-AK), the proposed bill would reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) with new mandates for addressing climate change, forage fish and electronic monitoring. The last MSA authorization was passed in 2006 and attempts at reauthorization since then have been polarizing.

Issues such as essential fish habitat, bycatch reductions and management of forage fish have had both their supporters and their detractors in Congress and in fisheries. The latest reauthorization attempt by Huffman includes issues such as data collection, shark research and working waterfronts that have bipartisan support and would help the bill to get heard in committee and on the floor. While the draft bill introduces some needed changes to the MSA, other sections raise concerns. That is why the Council Coordination Committee (CCC) will likely revise its legislative working paper to address these issues. To see the latest updates on the CCC's Legislative Working Group paper, visit www.fisherycouncils.org.

Besides a reauthorization of the MSA, there is another bill

that seeks an amendment to modernize fisheries policies. On June 18, 2024, Rep. Mary Peltola (D-AK) introduced H.R. 8788, the Fisheries Improvement and Seafood Health (FISH) Act that would amend the MSA by adding a "Fisheries and Ecological Resilience Program." This program would inform fishery management by assessing anticipated impacts of changing ecosystem conditions and develop tools, training and support to Councils for management. The FISH Act would also amend the MSA to require Councils to consider ecosystems and changing ecological conditions and its impacts on fisheries, as well as require the Comptroller General to submit a report on the competitiveness of domestic seafood producers in domestic and global seafood trade.

One of the largest impacts on fisheries this century may be the U.S. Supreme Court decision in June regarding the "Chevron deference," which said courts should generally defer to the expertise of the federal agencies in the interpretation of the law. A group of fishermen took the National Marine Fisheries Service to court to challenge the federal policy of charging the fishing industry for at-sea observers, saying that nowhere in the MSA are fishermen required to pay for these regulations. Essentially, the fishermen argued that the government had overstepped its authority, and the Supreme Court agreed that deference to the agency's actions was invalid. The removal of the Chevron deference will have a large impact across the government and future rule-making.

As the elections near and attention shifts to the appropriations being considered, there may be a larger push to advance bills to a position where they can be acted upon before the end of this Congress. To keep updated on all of the legislation being proposed, visit www.congress.gov 

New Outreach Resources

The Council's Western Pacific Region Status of the Fisheries 2023 report is now available.

The publication highlights some of the changes in the U.S. Pacific Island fisheries from 2021 to 2023. Fishery statistics can be influenced by numerous factors, including environmental changes and socioeconomic variables. In recent years, major climate events and the lingering impacts and ongoing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic also affected regional fisheries in several ways. Some of these effects are described, in addition to recent stock statuses and management measures.

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



Council Family Updates



Ramsey



Perez

The U.S. Department of Commerce has appointed two new members to the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council. Council members are appointed to both obligatory (state-specific) and at-large (regional) seats. Council members serve a three-year term and can be reappointed to serve three consecutive terms. The current term is from Aug. 11, 2024, to Aug. 10, 2027. The Council members are:

Obligatory Seats

Matt Ramsey (Hawai'i)*

Francisco (Frank) Perez (Guam)

**reappointment*

At the **199th Council meeting**, the Council supported the following advisory body changes:

- **Jude Lizama**, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Division of Fish and Wildlife, on the Archipelagic Plan Team
- **Gene Pan** and **Keith Ah Soon** on the American Samoa Advisory Panel

Several Council Family members from Guam participated in the Hawai'i Sea Grant Voice of the Sea episode "Shark Depredation in Guam" in 2023 (Season 10, Episode 3), including **Jason Biggs**, **James Borja**, **Michael Dueñas**, **Cecilio Raiukilipiy** and **Audrey Toves**. In August 2024, the episode won a Silver Telly Award for Television programming in Sustainability as well as a Bronze Telly Award for Television programming in Culture & Lifestyle. Congratulations!

Watch the full episode at: <https://seagrant.soest.hawaii.edu/shark-depredation-in-guam>.

News from Our Scholarship Students and Summer Intern

The Council is currently sponsoring two U.S. Pacific Territories Fishery Capacity-Building Scholarship students and one summer intern at the Council office in Honolulu. Find out what they have been up to lately!

Motusaga Vaeoso – from American Samoa, obtaining master of science degree from the University of Guam



Over the past several months, I have made significant advancements in my research and associated activities.

Main Achievements:

1. **Data Processing:** We successfully processed the majority of monitoring data collected from 2021 to 2023. This data is essential for my thesis work, focusing on the health and sustainability of coral reefs.
2. **American Samoa Trip:** Our recent trip to American Samoa was highly productive. We presented the territorial monitoring report on 12 coral reefs, which was well-received by local stakeholders. We engaged with partners from the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR), National Parks of American Samoa, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Marine Sanctuary, American Samoa Community College, and other Coral Reef Advisory Group (CRAG) members. The meeting was invaluable in informing local management strategies with our data.
3. **Workshops and Capacity Building:**
 - Hosted a workshop on using a web portal database for easy access to our collected data, aiding local managers.
 - Collaborated with DMWR and CRAG staff to enhance their monitoring skills and calibrate survey divers, ensuring high-quality fish data collection.
 - Established a workspace on CoralNet to assist staff in processing benthic data with the help of artificial intelligence.
4. **Drone Piloting Assistance:** During the American Samoa trip, I assisted the CRAG team in flying drones for reef monitoring, utilizing my drone pilot license obtained from the UOG DroneCorps program last year. This license was put to good use, particularly during the current coral

bleaching event, to monitor and assess the health of coral reefs effectively.

5. Micronesia Challenge Collaboration:

In April, I extended our training programs to the Micronesia Challenge teams, replicating the successful training provided in American Samoa.

Future Plans:

I intend to enroll in my final thesis credits in fall 2024 and aim to defend my thesis shortly thereafter. The support and opportunities provided by the Council scholarship have been instrumental in achieving these milestones. The collaborations and data collected will significantly contribute to the sustainability and management of coral reef ecosystems in the region.

Christine Tominiko - from American Samoa, obtaining master of science degree from the University of Hawai'i at Hilo



Christine Tominiko removing invasive floating water hyacinth from the Waiākea estuary pond located in Hilo, Hawai'i.

Talofa lava! I have just finished my first two semesters for the Tropical Conservation Biology and Environmental Science degree. I am spending my summer doing a professional internship at the the Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources in Hilo under Troy Sakihara. For my project, I am working on creating a monitoring plan for the Waiākea fishpond and with this we focus not only on the fish community, but the management of aquatic plants. This plan will focus on methods of obtaining a more comprehensive understanding of fish composition within the estuary, as well as the maintenance of the surrounding habitat. We hope to incorporate various effective scientifically proven methods within this plan, and we are also looking to extend out to other colleagues for their

expertise to have a strong foundation and positive results. The project will extend into the fall semester.

As of right now I am learning new things and meeting many people of different backgrounds working in the same field. It has been a great experience to not only work in this organization but gain a relationship with the place that I must study, and along the way I gain relationships with others. Aside from working on my project, I have also had the opportunity to participate in other projects within this organization and be part of outreach efforts.

It has not been smooth sailing, but I would like to think on the positive side, we are still sailing, and each day has a different goal. I may not see it now, but I know these goals are the steps towards completing my future academic goals.

Mattias Ali'ikai Namur – Summer Intern, obtaining bachelor of science from Hawai'i Pacific University

I am entering my second year of college, majoring in marine biology at Hawai'i Pacific University. My tasks at the Council have included transferring observer data to an online platform, analyzing the comparison between Guam fisheries and El Niño/La Niña events, monitoring the virtual aspect of hybrid meetings, researching NOAA's strategic plan goals over the years, analyzing the short-line fishery and working on a lunar calendar along with



providing general support to the Council staff. The highlight of my experience this summer has been the opportunity to apply my academic studies in a real-world setting. Observing the Council's proceedings has given me valuable insights and experiences that extend beyond the classroom.



The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council Family will be well-represented at the 154th Annual Meeting of the American Fisheries Society, being held Sept. 15-19, 2024 in Honolulu. The theme is "Conserving Fishes and Fishing Traditions through Knowledge Co-Production." Council Family presenters include **Will Sword, Archie Soliai, Ray Hilborn, Nate Ilaoa, Eric Kingma, Mark Fitchett, Zach Yamada and Joshua DeMello**. Many topics will focus on marine protected areas and the expansion of areas closed to fishing in the Pacific. Others will share how our Council incorporates sociocultural and economic information into catch limit determinations; a collaborative approach to rebuilding striped marlin; and the benefits of exposing university students to the federal fishery management process. <https://afsannualmeeting.fisheries.org> 🐟

Upcoming Events

CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

AMs for the Guam bottomfish fishery to rebuild the stock by 2031. The Council will consider the following options:

- 1) Option 1: No action. Do not modify the rebuilding plan.
- 2) Option 2: Modify the rebuilding plan.
 - a. Maintain an ACL of 31,000 pounds and modify the AM to rebuild the stock by 2028;
 - b. Modify the ACL to 34,500 pounds and the AMs to rebuild the stock by 2031;
 - c. Establish a prohibition on bottomfish fishing in federal waters to rebuild the stock by 2026.

3) AMs to consider for 2a and 2b:

- a. In-season monitoring using the creel survey expansion monitoring
- b. Post-season three-year average overage adjustment

3. Review of MSA 304(i) Domestic Obligations for Western and Central 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 it is still experiencing overfishing under the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plan. NOAA General Counsel Pacific Islands Section and Pacific Islands Regional Office Sustainable Fisheries Division will decide whether this stock status change removes the need for the Council to implement a domestic measure under Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) Section 304(i). If domestic action is not required, NMFS may cancel the previous rulemaking to establish a catch limit and AM for WCNPO

striped marlin in U.S. longline fisheries under the Hawai'i limited-entry program.

At its 193rd meeting, the Council had recommended that NMFS set a catch limit of 457 tons and a retention limit of 443 tons for vessels with a Hawai'i limited-entry longline permit. If the retention limit is projected to be reached, striped marlin retention would be prohibited for the rest of the year. The Council recommended that these limits be implemented as a regulatory amendment for quick action. If the previously recommended amendment is not implemented by NMFS under MSA 304(i), the Council may consider other alternatives to establish a catch limit under MSA 304(e) or other MSA provisions.

At its 200th meeting, the Council may modify the purpose and need for a catch limit for WCNPO striped marlin and reconsider the alternatives from its action at its 193rd meeting:

- 1) Alternative 1, the no action or status quo alternative, would not set a retention limit for WCNPO striped marlin.
- 2) Alternative 2 would set a longline retention limit of 443 tons and a catch limit of 457 tons. This is consistent with Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) conservation and management measures, is below the 2019 catch levels, and is the Council's preferred alternative.
- 3) Alternative 3 would set a longline retention limit of 397 tons and a catch limit of 409 tons, consistent with a reduction of the relative contribution of U.S. vessels to international overfishing of this stock.
- 4) Alternative 4 would prohibit retention of WCNPO striped marlin (a retention limit of 0 tons). 🐟

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

SEPTEMBER

11-13

153rd Scientific & Statistical Committee (SSC) meeting

15-19

154th Annual Meeting of the American Fisheries Society, Honolulu*

20

Fishing Rights of Indigenous People Standing Committee meeting

20

Executive & Budget Standing Committee meeting

23-25

200th Council meeting

24-Oct 1

20th Regular Session of the Western & Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Technical & Compliance Committee, Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia

OCTOBER

16-17

Council Coordination Committee Meeting, Washington, D.C.*

21-23

Permanent Advisory Committee meeting to advise the U.S. Commissioners to the WCPFC, virtual*

26-Nov 1

Future of PICES: Science for Sustainability in 2030, Honolulu*

NOVEMBER

28-Dec 3

21st Regular Session of the WCPFC, Suva, Fiji*

DECEMBER

9-11

154th SSC meeting (tent)

13-18

201st Council meeting (tent)

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

Upcoming Events

The 153rd Scientific & Statistical Committee (SSC) meeting will be held Sept. 11 to 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/153SSCMtg>.

Major agenda items include: Guam bottomfish rebuilding plan modifications (action item); Guam bottomfish data for future assessments; Noncommercial fisheries data updates; Review of annual research prioritization by an SSC working group; Hawai'i shallow-set longline fishery tori line experimental fishing project report; False killer whale foreign fleet impact analysis; Hawai'i and American Samoa longline fishery mid-year reports; Electronic monitoring regulatory development update; and Striped marlin rebuilding plan analyses review.

The 200th meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will be held Sept. 23 to 25, 2024, at the Ala Moana Hotel, Hibiscus Ballroom, 410 Atkinson Dr., Honolulu, HI. The meeting will be in a hybrid format, with in-person participation available for Council members and the public, or remote participation via Webex: <https://tinyurl.com/200CouncilMtg>.

Major agenda items include: Setting 2024-2027 annual catch limits (ACLs) for the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) deep-seven bottomfish fishery (final action); Hawai'i small-boat fisheries update; Guam bottomfish rebuilding plan modifications (initial action); Guam bottomfish data for future assessments; Pacific Remote Island Areas and Northwestern Hawaiian Islands sanctuary proposal status; Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act updates; CNMI bottomfish permit and reporting update; False killer whale foreign fleet impact analysis; Review of Magnuson-Stevens Act 304(i) domestic obligations for Western and Central North Pacific striped marlin

(initial action); Electronic monitoring program considerations update; and Offshore energy development in the Western Pacific status.

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

Summary of Action Items at the September 2024 Council Meeting

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

1. 2024-2027 ACLs Specifications for Main Hawaiian Islands Deep-Seven Bottomfish (Final Action)

At its 198th meeting, the Council received the 2024 MHI deep-seven bottomfish benchmark stock assessment and accepted it as best scientific information available (BSIA) on the status of the fishery. The Council directed staff to convene the P* (Risk of Overfishing) and SEEM (Social, Economic, Ecological and Management Uncertainty) Working Groups. In May 2024, the Council's P* and SEEM Working Groups and the SSC evaluated the scientific, social, ecological, economic, and management uncertainties and recommended a risk level to the Council.

At its 199th meeting held in June 2024, the Council received the report from the P* and SEEM working group analysis that quantified an 11% reduction due to data and management uncertainty. The Council took initial action and identified alternative 3 as its preliminary preferred alternative.

At its 200th meeting, the Council will consider taking final action on an alternative to specify ACLs and accountability measures (AMs) for the MHI deep-seven bottomfish fishery for fishing years 2024-2025 to 2026-2027. The Council will consider the following alternatives:

- 1) Alternative 1: No action. Do not specify an ACL and AMs.

- 2) Alternative 2: Status quo, specify an ACL of 492,000 pounds.

- 3) Alternative 3: Specify an ACL (493,000 pounds) based on P* and SEEM scores (P*=39%) (Preliminary preferred).

- 4) Alternative 4: Specify an ACL (<493,000 pounds) below the P* and SEEM scores (P*<39%).

2. Modifying the Guam Bottomfish Rebuilding Plan (Initial Action)

A 2018 stock assessment determined that the Guam bottomfish fishery complex was overfished and experiencing overfishing. Based on that determination, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) informed the Council of a change in stock status for Guam bottomfish, requiring the Council to end overfishing and to develop a rebuilding plan within 15 months. In response, the Council lowered catch limits to <31,000 pounds to reduce overfishing and developed a rebuilding plan to restore the stocks. The Council, however, noted issues with the data and stock assessment and requested NMFS to reassess the stocks.

In June 2024, NMFS presented an updated stock assessment for the Guam bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) to the Council. The assessment, following earlier recommendations for a data workshop, found the fishery was not overfished. However, it had not met the rebuilding criteria set by the Mariana Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan. A Western Pacific Stock Assessment Review panel confirmed the assessment's validity, and the Council's SSC approved it as BSIA. At its 198th meeting, the Council directed staff to develop options for modifying Guam bottomfish rebuilding plan, and requested catch projections from the NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center and a progress review from the Pacific Islands Regional Office.

At its 200th meeting, the Council will consider taking initial action on an option to modify the rebuilding plan and specifying the ACL and

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