

SPC/Fisheries 23/IP 24
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ORIGINAL:ENGLISH

TWENTY THIRD REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES
(Noumea, New Caledonia, 5-9 August 1991)

COUNTRY STATEMENT - NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

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Background

Since the establishment of a political union with the United States in 1976, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) experienced rapid economic growth. The rapid growth, attributed mainly by the success of the CNMI's Tourism Industry, is gradually changing the pace of commercial fisheries development and the local government's perception of the need to develop this industry.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife of the Department of Natural Resources is the agency of the Northern Mariana Islands' government mandated by law to develop the CNMI's fisheries resources. Since its inception, the Division has accomplished a number of significant fisheries development projects. These projects are summarized in the following:

Investigation of Potential Fisheries/Training

Field investigations to determine the feasibility for Ika Shibi, and deep bottom/bottom longline fisheries were conducted. Ralph Takafuji, an experienced Ika-Shibi fisherman from Hawaii, and Peter Watt, masterfisherman from the South Pacific Commission conducted the investigations respectively. Findings from both investigations were promising and the techniques were shared to interested local fishermen. Final reports for both projects have been completed.

A project proposal requesting funding from the U.S. government was submitted for a charter boat feasibility study in the CNMI. Funding for this project has not been approved.

Northern Marianas Fisheries Officers and fishermen benefited from training offered by the local government and other organizations. Four fisheries officers have completed the SPC/Nelson Polytechnic School of Fishing and over 70 fishermen participated in the Ika-Shibi and DFW/SPC Bottom - Bottomlongline fishing training.

Access to Fishing Grounds

Accessibility to fishing grounds was greatly improved when six launching ramps were constructed at the three main islands - Saipan (3), Tinian (1) and Rota(2).

Installation of navigational aid buoys marking 2 small channels heavily used by local fishermen have been completed. Dredging of Sugar Dock channel was also accomplished to improve ingress and egress of these vessels.

Docks and Marinas

The Commonwealth Ports Authority funded the construction of one small boat floating dock each for Rota and Tinian. The Division, through funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is presently constructing a 50 slip sheltered marina on Saipan. Completion of this project is expected by September of this year.

Fish Aggregation Devices (FAD)

The three FADs deployed off Saipan, Tinian and Rota broke off last year. The Saipan FAD was recovered and will be redeployed this year.

Mooring accessories for 10 FADs were purchased using local funds. U.S. Government funding for the purchase of 10 FAD buoys from Hawaii and for Training of 2 CNMI fishery officers on Hawaii's deployment techniques was approved. Purchase of the FADs and the training will be accomplished this year.

Aquaculture

The development of aquaculture is recognized as a need to diversify the CNMI's economy. A Division staff was sent to MMDC and another to FSM for training on giant clam mariculture.

The government is assisting a local private corporation in leasing public land for the development of a giant clam mariculture center. The Private Corporation intends to raise and sell giant clam meat and other giant clam products to the local and tourist markets.

Present Status of Fishery

The fishing industry in the CNMI is still at its infancy but is developing. This industry may be described as **Artisanal** (small scale commercial production - landed fish sold locally); **Subsistence** (landed fish for self consumption with occasional sale of surplus catch); and **Part Time Commercial/Recreational** (fish part-time and sell catch locally or keep for self consumption). The charter boat fishery as recently been developed but is gaining popularity from local fishermen.

Boats used for Artisanal and Part-time Commercial/Recreational fishing remain relatively stable since 1984. Boats used for subsistence fishing has, however, increased. In 1984, a total of 223 boats were registered in the CNMI. There are now 445 boats registered (222 boats more than in 1984), 368 of which are used for fishing purposes.

Forty four boats are involved with full-time small scale commercial fishing. Trolling with occasional bottomfishing, spearfishing and handlining dominate this category. There are presently 191 part-time commercial/recreational and 123 subsistence boats. Approximately 20 vessels are involved in the charter boat business and the remainder of registered vessels are used for other purposes. The majority of these boats are made of fiberglass and they ranged from 14 - 40 feet in length.

Fish landed by local fishermen are sold locally at fish markets, road-side fish mobiles or the numerous hotels on island. Local demand for fish products exceed local production, therefore, making the export of such products unfeasible at this time. Imports of fresh and frozen fish from neighboring islands, however, are substantial. A local fish retailer continue to import over 2,000 pounds of fresh and frozen fish from Truk and Palau per week.