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# COUNTRY STATEMENT - NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

## INTRODUCTION

The Division of Fish and Wildlife, under the Department of Natural Resources, is responsible for developing fisheries in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) through proper resource management. This is being done through market developments, fishery infrastructure development, research, management planning and implementation.

## DOMESTIC FISHERIES

A significant part of the domestic fishery in the CNMI is a day generation, usually trolling, utilising boats in the 14 to 24 foot range. Some larger vessels are used for sportfish charter and line boat operations in conjunction with the tourist industry. There has been a rapid increase in the number of fishing vessels/boats operating in the CNMI indicating that interests in commercial fishing is on an uprising (1982 records indicate 140 boats, 1985 records indicate 230+ boats). The most popular fishing methods are trolling, shallow/deep bottom fishing and spearfishing.

## MARKETING

The CNMI constructed a central fishery marketing facility on Saipan in 1982, which has come to be known as the "Saipan Fishing Center". This facility consists of retail/wholesale sales area, a fish processing area, freezer and chill facilities, and an ice-making machine. It is presently being operated by a private company. One of the principals I might mention of this company was a trainee of the Nelson/Polytechnic Fishery Training Programme co-ordinated and co-sponsored by the South Pacific Commission. The overall impact of this facility towards marketing has been positive and has contributed significantly toward the development of a commercial fishery in the CNMI. However, that is not to say that all our marketing problems have been resolved. We are still experiencing problems during peak tuna/pelagic seasons and hopefully solutions will be forthcoming soon.

Total commercial landings for 1985 will be approximately 350,000 pounds with an estimated ex-vessel value of $450,000. The major portion is sold locally through the Saipan Fishing Center, and the rest through direct sales to major hotels, retail stores, smaller fish markets and to "tail-gate operations".

FISHERY INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENTS

We have recently completed major renovations of three boat launching ramps on Saipan and hope to do likewise on the islands of Tinian and Rota. With the large number of boats, the majority of which are trailered, we feel this development is appropriate. Funding for this particular projet came from U.S. National Marine Fishery Service. We have also just recently completed a "Five-year Boating Infrastructure Development Plan" which, if implemented, will undoubtedly provide badly needed improvements of our boating facilities and navigational aids to serve fishermen and boaters on Saipan, Rota and Tinian. We are at present planning funding from local and federal sources for these projects.

The Division is also implementing a continuation of the FAD programme and plans to deploy a system of these devices around the three main islands (Saipan, Rota, Tinian). I do not think there is a need to expound on the effectiveness of these devices as attractants to pelagic species to this group.

DATA COLLECTION PROGRAMME

This programme is ongoing since 1982 in the CNMI. It was developed and implemented through the assistance of the U.S. National Marine Fishery Service and the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council. Data are collected on commercial landings through invoicing sales made by fishermen and creed census programmes using the random interview technique. Data are also being collected on all local fishing vessels. All data are stored in ADP formats.

TUNA TRANSHIPMENTS

Beginning in 1983, purse seiners from several nations, including the United States, began using the Tinian Harbour to offload tuna, presumably caught in the South Pacific and FSM waters, onto larger carrier vessels. The Division of Fish and Wildlife began collecting data on these activities in February 1983. It is also interesting to mention that local fishermen have noted a dramatic decrease in both skipjack and yellowfin school frequency as well as a decrease in the size of these fish. They equate this with the presence of the purse seiner fleet in the Northern Marianas waters.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

Technical assistance is provided by the Division to individuals and other agencies in the local government on a great number of projects and issues. In addition, the Division offers extension services to local schools, public groups, fishermen and other interested parties. These services deal with subjects on conservation, fishing techniques, quality control and other related topics.