



NOAA
FISHERIES

Pacific Islands Geographic Strategic Plan 2020-2023



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A Message from our Leadership

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

We are pleased to present the NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Geographic Strategic Plan for 2020–2023. This effort between the Pacific Islands Regional Office and the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center is one of five regional NOAA Fisheries Geographic Strategic Plans intended to support the national NOAA Fisheries Strategic Plan for 2019–2022. This plan aligns with the three national strategic goals and the vision of the Department of Commerce and NOAA to help the American economy grow. We have included information about our mission and mandates, our regional organization, and the local landscape as a basis for the regional strategies to help us meet these three strategic goals over the next 4 years.

The Strategic Goals and Key Strategies outlined within this plan provide only a small narrative about the many important efforts to manage and conserve natural resources. These and many more activities we pursue will continue and enhance the ongoing science-based approaches to marine resources conservation and management in the Pacific Islands region. We will also continue a strong commitment to and investment in our workforce, and expand the involvement of our many partners and stakeholders in this approach. The intent of this plan is to provide a framework for making decisions about the work we undertake, the resources we allocate, and how we live up to our commitment to be a productive and rewarding workplace. We acknowledge that our success will only come if we work with our important NOAA colleagues in the NOAA General Counsel Pacific Islands Section and Enforcement Section, who provide sound legal advice, and the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement Pacific Islands Division, who ensure compliance with U.S. laws and regulations.

NOAA Fisheries in the Pacific Islands region has a well-earned reputation of achieving excellence in domestic and international forums, conducting cutting-edge scientific research, and providing a diverse and inclusive workplace for our staff and partners. It is our intention to improve the quality of service to the Pacific Islands region—the stakeholders, industries, and communities with whom we interact every day, providing sustainable fisheries and conserving protected species while supporting healthy economies in the U.S. Pacific Islands. We recognize the important efforts and results of NOAA Fisheries that have positively affected the communities and the environments where we live and work. We are committed to our mission and the nation and look forward to continuing our efforts to improve the health of our environment and economy.



Michael D. Tosatto
Regional Administrator
Pacific Islands Regional Office



Michael P. Seki, Ph.D.
Director
Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center

Mission and Mandates

NOAA Fisheries is responsible for the stewardship of the nation’s ocean resources and their habitat. We provide vital services for the nation, which ensure: productive and sustainable fisheries, safe sources of seafood, the recovery and conservation of protected resources, and healthy ecosystems—all backed by sound science and an ecosystem-based approach to management.

U.S. fisheries are among the largest and most sustainable in the world. The U.S. science-based fishery management process, as mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) and other acts, is designed to provide optimum yield while preventing overfishing and taking into account the protection of habitat and marine ecosystems, including co-management of four Pacific Island Marine National Monuments. NOAA Fisheries in the Pacific Islands region consists of the Pacific Islands Regional Office and the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC).

We partner to achieve our mission. Our partners include other NOAA Fisheries offices, NOAA line offices, the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (Western Pacific Council), federal agencies, the State of Hawai’i, U.S. Pacific Island territories, commercial and



recreational fishermen, local communities, national and regional aquaculture associations, foundations, non-governmental organizations, academia, and other stakeholders.

We work closely with the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council and state and territorial partners to develop and implement effective management programs. Working with the Council, NOAA Fisheries has implemented place-based Fishery Ecosystem Plans for Hawai'i, American Samoa, Mariana Archipelago, Pacific Remote Island Areas, and Pelagic Fishery Ecosystem. We also conduct extensive data collection programs in collaboration with our state and territorial partners, and provide stock assessments and ecological and socioeconomic information required for the federal management of fisheries and their essential habitats.

We are supported by the NOAA Fisheries Headquarters Office of Law Enforcement and its regional divisions, in partnership with states, territories, and other federal agencies who conduct compliance assistance and enforcement activities to ensure the success of our regulatory efforts and compliance with the nation's marine resource laws. Their jurisdiction within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) covers more than 1.7 million square nautical miles, which accounts for nearly half of the entire U.S. EEZ, and includes four Marine National Monuments (Papahānaumokuākea, Marianas Trench, Pacific Remote Islands, and Rose Atoll Marine National Monuments), as well as two Sanctuaries (Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary and National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa).

NOAA Fisheries also seeks to grow domestic marine aquaculture production, supplementing U.S. wild-caught fisheries while promoting business and employment opportunities. NOAA Fisheries accomplishes this by working closely with federal, state, and territorial partners to develop effective and streamlined aquaculture permitting systems, and by providing science and services to support the expansion and sustainability of U.S. marine aquaculture.

The health of species like marine mammals, sea turtles, and corals is important for maintaining balanced and thriving ocean ecosystems and supporting a thriving ocean and coastal recreation sector. We work to conserve marine species and their habitats, protect them from detrimental human activities, and monitor activities that might impact them, as mandated by the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).

NOAA Fisheries promotes international cooperation to ensure sustainability of fisheries and species conservation globally. In partnership with government agencies of other countries, we negotiate and implement the provisions of international fisheries agreements in the Pacific Ocean.

Strategic Goals

Reflecting the vision of the Department of Commerce and NOAA to *Help the American Economy Grow*, our three Strategic Goals for 2020–2023 are:

- Amplify the economic value of commercial and recreational fisheries while ensuring their sustainability.
- Conserve and recover protected species while supporting responsible fishing and resource development.
- Improve organizational excellence and regulatory efficiency.

Regional Fishery Management Councils

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act created eight regional fishery management councils. These councils are responsible for fisheries requiring conservation and management in their region. Voting and non-voting council members, supported by NOAA Fisheries, represent the commercial and recreational fishing sectors and environmental, academic, and government interests.

Under the MSA, councils are required to:

- Develop fishery management plans and recommend regulations to NMFS.
- Convene committees and advisory panels and conduct public meetings.
- Develop research priorities in conjunction with a Scientific and Statistical Committee.
- Select fishery management options.
- Recommend to NMFS annual catch limits based on best available science.
- Establish rebuilding plans.

NOAA Fisheries works closely with the councils to designate essential fish habitat for federally managed species, research and describe habitats essential for each life stage of many species, create maps, and designate Habitat Areas of Particular Concern.

The Pacific Islands Regional Office and Science Center work closely with the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council.

Learn more about the Regional Fishery Management Councils.

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/partners#regional-fishery-management-councils>

Organizations

PIRO and PIFSC are co-located at the NOAA Inouye Regional Center in Honolulu, Hawai'i.

Facilities

Honolulu Service Center (Pier 38)
American Samoa Field Office
Guam and Saipan Field Offices

Available Observation Platforms

NOAA Ship *Oscar Elton Sette*
NOAA Ship *Rainier*

Pacific Islands Regional Office

Our organization of 120 employees is aligned toward the achievement of our three strategic goals. We are organized as follows:

- **Sustainable Fisheries Division:** Responsible for providing guidance to the Western Pacific Council in developing fishery management plans. Trains at-sea fishery observers, manages observer-collected data, implements fishing requirements and annual catch limits, supports aquaculture, issues fishing permits, engages with the recreational fishing community, and trains fishermen to handle protected species.
- **Protected Resources Division:** Responsible for protecting, conserving, and recovering endangered and threatened species and marine mammals as mandated by the ESA and MMPA.
- **Habitat Conservation Division:** Responsible for protecting, restoring, and promoting stewardship of marine and coastal habitat that support fisheries and conserve protected resources. This includes responsibilities associated with managing Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) per the MSA and co-management of the four Pacific Islands Marine National Monuments.
- **International Fisheries Division:** Responsible for negotiating and implementing the provisions of international fisheries agreements in the Pacific Ocean and strengthening international fisheries institutions and partnerships in the region.
- **Operations, Management and Information Division:** Provides high-quality customer service, oversight, and technical tools necessary to help further the success of the PIRO and NOAA mission, while ensuring compliance with agency policies and regulations.
- **Directorate:** Responsible for providing strategic leadership for regional priorities and our agency mission, including compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), provision of GIS data resources, and communication in support of NOAA's mission.



Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center:

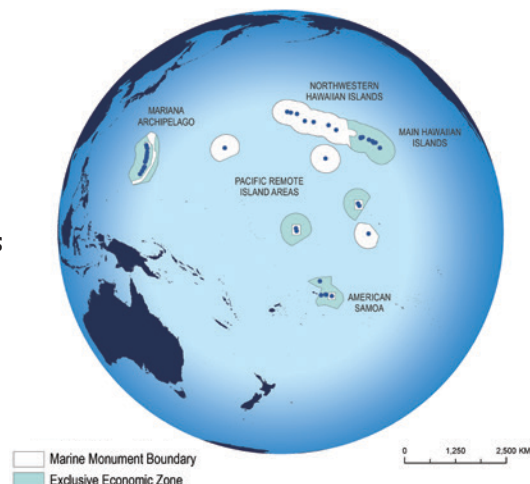
Our organization of 230 staff members, which includes federal and non-federal staff, is aligned toward the achievement of our three strategic goals. We are organized as follows:

- **Fisheries Research and Monitoring Division:** Responsible for the Center's programs for fisheries monitoring, fisheries data management, fisheries interactions, fish life history studies, and stock assessment for domestic and international fisheries.
- **Protected Species Division:** Provides a scientific foundation for the conservation of protected species, notably cetaceans, Hawaiian monk seals, and sea turtles in the Pacific Islands, guided by the mandates of the MMPA, ESA, and international agreements.
- **Ecosystem Sciences Division:** Conducts multidisciplinary research, monitoring, and analysis of integrated environmental and living resource systems in coastal and offshore waters in the Pacific Ocean.
- **Science Operations Division:** Provides support and logistical services for the Center's scientific research activities, products, and publications to ensure their safety and success.
- **Operations, Management, and Information Division:** Provides high-quality customer service, oversight, and technical tools necessary to help further the success of the PIFSC and NOAA mission, while ensuring compliance with agency policies and regulations.
- **Director's Office:** Provides Center-wide vision, guidance, and oversight in support of NOAA's mission and PIFSC's priorities and direction.



The Local Landscape

Consisting of the Hawaiian Archipelago in the north, American Samoa and U. S. Pacific Remote Island Areas (PRIAs) in the south, and the Marianas Archipelago in the west, the Pacific Islands region encompasses the largest geographical area within NOAA Fisheries' jurisdiction. The portion of the U.S. EEZ within the region encompasses more than 1.7 million square nautical miles of ocean, roughly equal to the portion of the EEZ adjacent to the continental United States. We advance U.S. interests in domestic, international, and other nations' waters, with a focus on managing fisheries and living marine resources and their habitats in the waters surrounding Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), the PRIAs, and on the high seas. This region is home to diverse cultures, many protected species including the endemic Hawaiian monk seal, and numerous valuable fisheries that support local and national economies. NOAA Fisheries and the Western Pacific Council develop and maintain policy and operating agreements to facilitate partnership and coordination of research, management, and conservation of fishery resources in the Pacific Islands region. Regional agreements such as the Regional Operating Agreement, Fishery Data Collection and Research Strategic Plan, Marine Recreational Information Program Pacific Islands Region Implementation Plan, and Western Pacific Stock Assessment and Review Policy describe procedures and actions undertaken by NOAA Fisheries and the Council to implement fishery conservation and management measures and regulations for the region's fisheries.



Some of the *Issues* we face:

- Competition, both internationally and domestically, for shared living marine resources that have limited productivity.
- Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing's effects on transboundary and highly migratory stocks, and its effects on U.S. fisheries and food security.
- Changes to the oceanic and coastal conditions (e.g., ocean acidification and coastal habitat loss) that affect sustainability, distribution, and productivity of fish and other marine species.
- Increased volatility of environmental conditions (e.g., oceanic, coastal, and atmospheric) that can affect species, fisheries, and communities.
- Effects of pollution and marine debris on water quality, marine species, and ecosystem health.

Some of the *Challenges* we must address:

- Improving the data collection program for data-limited fisheries that can provide the data, scientific information, and monitoring systems necessary for robust stock assessments and to support in-season fishery management in the region.
- Improving offshore aquaculture permitting and enhancing opportunities for appropriate offshore aquaculture to develop in the region.
- Meeting the increased needs for stock assessment data and modeling capabilities to support optimal catch levels.

- Integrating disparate fisheries data streams to streamline management processes and to leverage fisheries data to make better decisions faster.
- Leveling the playing field for U.S. fisheries under international management vis-à-vis foreign fisheries.
- Convincing other nations to exert an adequate level of control over their fishing vessels.
- Effectively linking habitat management to improved fisheries management and protected species recovery.
- Defining large marine ecosystems within the region.
- Filling gaps in regional capacity (e.g., adequate staff, data, and modelling capabilities) to conduct robust economic analyses of national and international fishery regulations and measures on U.S. Pacific Islands fisheries.
- Implementing Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management (EBFM).
- Adapting fisheries management to changing fisheries dynamics and ocean conditions.
- Establishing an adequate and consistent level of surveys and population assessments for marine resource management.
- Managing the need to balance sustainable fisheries, human use, and development with marine species conservation and management, and the protection of special areas like marine monuments.
- Balancing fisheries, other human uses, and development with protected species conservation and habitat management through achieving regulatory efficiency in conducting timely and effective ESA and EFH consultations and MMPA actions, and effectively prioritizing workload.
- Minimizing regulatory burden while ensuring sustainable fisheries and protecting marine species and their habitats.
- Minimizing adverse impacts on bycatch species (i.e., non-target and protected species) while supporting commercial and non-commercial fisheries.
- Attracting, retaining, and promoting well-qualified and diverse staff.
- Effectively communicating with culturally and politically diverse stakeholders over a wide geographical region as well as the federal government headquartered thousands of miles away.

Some of the *Risks* we foresee:

- NOAA's aging infrastructure and availability/dependability of vessels could impact data collection critical for resource management.
- Increased litigation could divert resources and end up driving priorities for fishery management and protected species conservation.
- Growing and unrestricted international fishing capacity could jeopardize local economies that are heavily reliant on tuna and other pelagic species (for example, canneries are a main component of American Samoa's economy and tuna is the number one agro-product in Hawai'i).
- Lack of domestic workforce trained and educated to be the next generation of fishermen and owners/workers in the seafood industry and affiliated industries (e.g., mechanics) could reduce the long-term viability of U.S. fisheries.
- Increasing domestic and international mandates and requirements that do not match the level of available staff or resources, in combination with declining or static budgets, could affect our ability to achieve our strategic goals.

Strategic Goal 1: Amplify the economic value of commercial and recreational fisheries while ensuring their sustainability

PIRO, PIFSC, and the Western Pacific Council work together to responsibly manage our commercial and recreational fisheries and to amplify their economic value through effective management of the MSA. For example, PIFSC undertakes studies to improve understanding of target pelagic fish stocks, which then informs the adoption by Regional Fishery Management Organizations (RFMOs) of cost-effective conservation and management measures and aids development of domestic management measures that optimize benefits from our fisheries to the nation.



Key Strategies

1.1 Manage stocks for optimum yield

- Use the best scientific information available in the management of commercial and non-commercial pelagic and insular fisheries, and incorporate local knowledge if available.
- Coordinate internationally to see adoption by RFMOs of cost-effective conservation and management measures for key fish stocks and effective implementation by member nations.

1.2 Increase U.S. marine aquaculture production

- Support the development and responsible management of regional offshore aquaculture by completing the programmatic environmental impact statement, analyzing the feasibility of territorial aquaculture, and streamlining aquaculture permits.
- Explore external partnerships to support research collaborations and capitalize on innovations within the region.

1.3 Adequately assess all prioritized stocks and maintain information for currently assessed stocks

- Implement stock assessment prioritization as prescribed by the NOAA Fisheries Stock Assessment Improvement plan.
- Use the annual Stock Assessment and Fisheries Evaluation reports to inform management actions. Integrate social, ecological, and biophysical research efforts to inform EBFM.
- Support cooperative fisheries research with the industry.

1.4 Modernize fishery information collection, management, and dissemination systems, and enhance cooperative data collection and sharing

- Use the best integrated, most appropriate, cost-effective technologies to observe, assess, conserve, and manage marine resources, including best available habitat science.
- Utilize new and emerging technologies to improve accuracy, efficiency, and access to commercial and non-commercial fishery data.
- Provide rigorous protection of information technology resources.
- Enhance coordination of federal and state/territorial data collection improvement efforts by utilizing the existing frameworks.

1.5 Strengthen international institutions and partnerships

- Level the playing field for U.S. fisheries by seeing the adoption and implementation of equitable and transparent compliance monitoring processes in RFMOs in order to combat IUU fishing and seafood fraud, and advance fair trade.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of RFMOs and build the capacity of other nations in the region, through technical assistance and collaboration, to undertake fisheries science and manage their fisheries.

1.6 Increase consumer confidence in the quality and safety of U.S. seafood while promoting sustainable fisheries development

- Promote U.S. seafood and sustainable fisheries development through supporting fleet development, dock-side services, and community participation, and coordinating with the state and territories to align regulatory mechanisms to allow for maximization of catch.
- Support regional seafood projects that promote U.S. seafood and fishing sustainability.

1.7 Assess and predict the impacts of environmental changes and activities on fisheries and ecosystems

- Identify how environmental changes and human activities will affect fisheries and ecosystems in the region by developing ecosystem indicators and determining appropriate thresholds.
- Design and develop new and innovative management systems that are adaptive to change with the goal of maintaining economically viable and sustainable fisheries into the future.
- Build partnerships and use EBFM techniques, retrospective analysis, and management strategy evaluation in furtherance of these efforts.

Key Indicators

- Fish Stock Sustainability Index.
- Number of domestic stocks for which annual catch does not exceed the annual catch limit.
- Number of adequate assessments for fish stocks.
- Trend in U.S. marine aquaculture production (% increase over the previous year).
- Compliance rate of Seafood Import Monitoring Program entries reviewed through audit and inspection.

Strategic Goal 2: Conserve and recover protected species while supporting responsible fishing and resource development

PIRO, PIFSC, and the Western Pacific Council work together to conserve and recover protected species and promote sustainable fishing practices through effective management of the ESA, MMPA, Clean Water Act (CWA), and Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (FWCA), as well as spatial conservation efforts such as Marine National Monuments.



Key Strategies

2.1 Stabilize highest priority protected species

- Develop, implement, and update recovery plans for ESA-listed species with a focus on Species in the Spotlight and effective habitat conservation and restoration.
- Improve international collaboration and coordination on the recovery of protected species
- Increase the capacity to respond to stressed, sick, injured, and stranded marine species and support enhancements to mitigation techniques to recover protected species in the Pacific Islands Region.

2.2 Review and streamline permitting and authorization processes for fisheries, energy development, and national defense, while maximizing conservation outcomes

- Streamline ESA, MMPA, and EFH consultation and environmental review (CWA, FWCA, and NEPA) processes to ensure timely completion of consultations and review. Facilitate simplified processes for applicants seeking permits (e.g., Monuments, aquaculture).
- Develop shared protocols with our partners to improve consistency and timeliness of agency-to-agency issued permits and consultations.
- Establish collaborative mitigation methodologies and tools.

2.3 Minimize bycatch and entanglement of protected species while supporting fisheries

- Work with partners and stakeholders—including state and territorial agencies, fishermen, and academic and environmental organizations—to understand and mitigate fishery effects on protected species and on non-target, associated, and dependent species through development and implementation of measures to reduce impacts while maintaining social and economic benefits to fishing communities.

2.4 Preserve special places and conserve ocean trust resources in the midst of changing climate conditions

- Develop and implement management plans for the Pacific Marine National Monuments and implementations plans for the designated Habitat Blueprint focus areas.
- Increase capacity to conserve and enhance EFH.
- Consider and appropriately designate critical habitat.
- Increase the effectiveness of coral reef conservation programs in the region.
- Assess and predict how environmental changes, extremes, and human activities affect ecosystems, and design new management paradigms in support of conservation and recovery.
- Engage communities in seeking effective site-based, spatial scale, and large marine ecosystem-level approaches to institutionalize support for effective management of fisheries, protected resources, and habitat.

Key Indicators

- Number of protected species designated as threatened, endangered, or depleted with stable or increasing population levels.
- Number and percentage of recovery actions ongoing or completed.
- Percentage of protected species with adequate assessments.
- Average number of days to complete consultations, permits, and authorizations.
- Number of consultations, permits, or authorizations that enhance conservation of protected species.
- Ability of observer program to continue to meet 100 percent mandated coverage rates.
- Percent of mandated coverage rates for observer program.



Strategic Goal 3: Improve organizational excellence and regulatory efficiency

PIRO, PIFSC, and the Western Pacific Council work together to improve organizational excellence and regulatory efficiency. For example, based on the best scientific information available from PIFSC, the Council recommends and PIRO implements rules to reclassify certain fish stocks in the Pacific Islands as ecosystem component species, enabling NOAA Fisheries and the Council to prioritize conservation and management efforts on key target fish stocks and improve efficiency of fishery management.



Key Strategies

3.1 Match a diverse workforce to mission needs

- Maintain an adequately sized and structured diverse workforce that is responsive to regional needs.
- Ensure that employees have the necessary skill sets to meet their work requirements, and that continuity and succession planning are appropriately considered in workforce decisions.
- Improve internal coordination, communication, and collaboration that promotes employee engagement and fosters an inclusive and safe workplace for all employees.
- Optimize partner, stakeholder, and public engagement.

3.2 Recapitalize infrastructure and facilities

- Effectively manage infrastructure, information technology services, equipment, and facilities to meet priority research, monitoring, and management needs.
- Protect our existing facilities investment by prioritizing and addressing critical maintenance needs on time and within budget.

3.3 Institutionalize prioritization and performance management practices

- Implement performance management practices that incentivize employees to share experiences and learn from each other across the region and NOAA.
- Empower employees to offer and implement solutions to workplace issues.
- Improve the efficiency of regional planning and prioritization processes.

3.4 Review agency regulations and remove or modify rules that unnecessarily burden businesses and economic growth

- Streamline administrative policies and processes to improve mission effectiveness.
- Review regional regulations and rules to identify areas for deregulation or improved permitting and regulatory efficiencies.
- Work with the state and territories to identify regulations that may unduly limit economic growth in fisheries.

3.5 Institutionalize the use of innovative technologies

- Modernize data management region-wide.
- Strategically integrate, manage, and disseminate all data and data products.
- Invest in new capabilities and capacity to explore and develop new approaches, such as advanced technologies (e.g., unmanned survey vehicles), genomics, and artificial intelligence applications that will improve the quality of our research and management.

3.6 Promote strategic coordination and collaboration across the Pacific Islands region

- Enhance strategic coordination across the region among PIRO, PIFSC, and the Council to ensure timely, appropriate, and effective development and implementation of fishery management and protected species conservation actions.
- Enhance the action-oriented approach for facilitating Department of Defense environmental compliance with federal natural resource regulations.
- Maintain and enhance partnerships with scientific partners, including academic institutions locally, nationally, and internationally.

Key Indicators

- Geographic scores on the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Key Indices.
- Geographic contribution to agency performance measures.
- Percentage of priority planned accomplishments completed.
- Percentage of facility condition assessments completed.





U.S. Secretary of Commerce
Wilbur Ross

Acting Under Secretary of Commerce
for Oceans and Atmosphere
Neil Jacobs, Ph.D.

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March 2020

www.fisheries.noaa.gov

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