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SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

TWENTY-FOURTH REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES
(Noumea, New Caledonia, 3-7 August 1992)

COUNTRY STATEMENT

THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

Background

In late 1976, the Northern Mariana Islands became a political union with the United States, which established the Commonwealth Government of the Northern Mariana Islands. The Commonwealth is now experiencing rapid economic growth through the Tourism Industry. This economic success 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 Island's 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 summarised as follows:

Investigation of Potential Fisheries and Training

Field investigations for Ika-Shibi, deep bottom/bottom longline fisheries were conducted. Masterfishermen from the South Pacific Commission and from Hawaii conducted the investigations respectively. Findings from both projects were promising and the techniques were shared among the participants. 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 these projects has not been approved.

Northern Marianas Fisheries Officers and fishermen benefitted from training offered by the local government and other organisations. Five fisheries officers have completed the SPC/Nelson Polytechnic School of Fishing Course and over 70 fishermen participated in the Ika-Shibi and DFW/SPC vertical bottom and bottom longline fishery training.

Access to fishing Grounds

Accessibility to fishing grounds was greatly improved with the completion of several launching ramps on the three populated islands (Saipan, Tinian and Rota).

Establishment of Navigational Aid buoys for two small boat channels on Saipan that is heavily used by fishermen have been completed. The improvement of Sugar Dock, dredging project for easier access in and out of the channel was also completed.

Docks and Marinas

The Division of Fish and Wildlife constructed a 58ft slip sheltered marina on Saipan through funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife constructed a 20 ft slip floating dock replacing the deteriorating wooden structure that was built by the Ports Authority. Funding for this floating dock was made available by the Mayor of Tinian.

Due to its deteriorating wooden materials, Rota floating dock awaits replacement.

Fish Aggregation Device (FAD)

Mooring accessories for 10 FADs had been procured, awaiting the completion of buoys refurbishment in Honolulu. Observers from DFW will participate in the Hawaii FAD deployment project scheduled for September this year.

Aquaculture

The development of aquaculture is recognised as a need to diversify the CNMI economy.

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

Present Status of Fishery

The fishery industry in the CNMI continued to develop due to the demand of fish for markets and for local consumption. The industry are divided into different categories : Artisanal - small scale commercial production - landed fish sold locally. Subsistence - landed fish for self consumption with occasional sale of surplus catch. Part time commercial/recreational - fish part-time and sell catch locally or keep for self consumption.

Boats used on the categories mentioned above total to 556. This is an increase of 111 registered boats in the CNMI over last year.

Fish landed by local fishermen are sold locally at fish markets, roadside fish mobiles or the numerous hotels on the 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 substantive. Three local fish retailers continue to import over 15,000 pounds of fresh and frozen fish from Truck, Ponape and Palau per week.
