



Summary of COVID-19 Impacts in the Western Pacific Region

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COUNCIL COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING

TELECONFERENCE CALL

May 27 - 28, 2020

1. American Samoa

HEALTH

- American Samoa has no confirmed COVID-19 cases and no way to test for it.

ECONOMY

- The American Samoa Government (ASG) enacted an emergency declaration in early March 2020.
- Hawaiian Airlines flights are suspended until at least June 1, 2020. Prior to COVID-19 Hawaiian Airlines flew to Pago Pago twice a week from Honolulu. The only other flights to American Samoa were from independent Samoa and Tonga.
- All cargo flights have been reduced to a single flight per week.
- Government employee work hours are reduced to 20 hours per week.
- Businesses can open for customers from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. only with the exception of takeout food establishments.
- Restaurants, bars and nightclubs can serve only 10 or fewer customers at a time. Some businesses are unable to cover payroll, rent, utilities and other fixed costs and have shut down.

FISHERIES

- Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources
 - Reduced government employee hours has further limited the ability to collect data from fishermen at a time when bottomfish data collection is most needed due to the recent stock assessment that determined that the fishery is overfished and experiencing overfishing. The general consensus is the real problem is the lack of complete and accurate data.
- Fishermen
 - Reduced business hours have directly affected fishermen who supply those businesses on a regular basis.
- StarKist Samoa
 - The governor granted the cannery a waiver to operate under normal hours.

- However, employee attendance has been unstable since the declaration, with absenteeism at a very high rate.
- Suspension of Hawaiian Airline flights has increased the cost of airfreight for the cannery and its canning plant.
- Shipping has been delayed due to suspension of all but one cargo flight per week.
- In March, pandemic-related restrictions across the Pacific complicated the placement of fishing observers required by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) on the US-flagged fishing vessels based in American Samoa that supply fish to the StarKist cannery. On March 27, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) granted the fleet an emergency waiver from the federal fishery observer coverage requirement. The waiver expires on May 31.
- With so many food production companies affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and with non-perishable foods at a premium, companies like StarKist Samoa are vital to both the American Samoa economy and the US food supply chain.
- American Samoa remains the last US state or territory to not have COVID-19 and is a strategic port for US fisheries operating in the South Pacific.

2. Hawai'i

HEALTH

- 640 confirmed cases of which 82 required hospitalization and 17 resulted in death (as of May 18, 2020)

ECONOMY

- Tourism makes up 21% of the state's economy. Many of Hawai'i's largest industries depend on the constant flow of tourists. In 2019, more than 10.4 million visitors to the Hawaiian Islands spent more than \$17.75 billion. As a point of comparison, the population of Hawai'i in 2019 was 1.4 million.
- On March 4, Governor Ige announced the first proclamation related to COVID-19 which has been supplemented eight times. In general, county mayors can and have issued restrictions that are equal to or stricter than those announced by the governor, e.g., the mayor of Kaua'i enforced a nighttime curfew.
- Gov. Ige has required mandatory 14-day quarantine for all travelers arriving in the state of Hawaii (implemented on March 26), as well as for interisland travelers (implemented on April 1), through June 30. Violations of this order could result in a misdemeanor with fines of up to \$5,000 and/or up to one year in prison, or both.
- As of May 18, a total of 5,523 visitors have come to Hawaii since the quarantine started, for a 39-day average of 141 visitors per day. This time last year, about 30,000 visitors arrived daily into Hawai'i.
- Under the current "Act with Care" phase, all persons within the State of Hawai'i are ordered to stay at home or in their place of residence, such as hotels or condominiums. Individuals may leave for essential activities or to engage in essential businesses and operations. Outdoor exercise is also permitted, including swimming,

surfing, jogging or walking on the beach, as long as social distancing requirements are observed.

- The state has had up to a 37% unemployment rate during the pandemic.
- On May 5, Gov. Ige authorized the first group of businesses to re-open. Restaurants remain closed except for carry out.

FISHERIES

- Commercial Fishing (*some information taken verbatim from HLA, UFA, Hawaii Seafood May 15, 2020, COVID-19 Impacts situation summary*)
 - Hawai'i's fresh fish market depends on restaurants being open to meet needs in the continental United States and locally in Hawai'i. As restaurants remain closed and it is unknown when they will operate at full capacity, the outlook for the Hawai'i commercial fishery is uncertain and disconcerting.
 - During the last two weeks of March, the value of dockside landings of fish at the Honolulu fish auction declined by 80%. The primary reason was the rapid elimination of foodservice (restaurant, hotel, catering) orders.
 - Several Hawai'i wholesale distribution companies each laid off large percentages of their employees.
 - One hundred of Hawai'i's 145 active longline vessels tied up at the pier.
 - In early April, the Hawaii Longline Association (HLA) and the United Fishing Agency (UFA, Honolulu fish auction) instituted a voluntary trip offload limit of 15,000 pounds per vessel and a daily auction volume cap of 60,000 pounds, which is around 70% of the historical daily average.
 - Auction prices for ancillary species—which comprise 30% of total landings (e.g., *opah* (moonfish), *monchong* (sickle pomfret), billfish and *ono* (wahoo)—remain at near-record lows.
 - In eight weeks, the Hawai'i longline fishery lost more than \$10 million in revenue compared to recent five-year average for the same period.
 - On March 27, NMFS enacted an emergency rule that granted the authority to waive specific observer requirements under certain circumstances. Observers have not been placed on Hawai'i-based longline vessels since the emergency rule took place.
 - The outlook for the industry looks pessimistic as Hawai'i tourism is nonexistent and projected to be at low levels through the end of 2020. Restaurants locally and on the US mainland continue to be restricted and operating at low volumes. If market conditions persist, the fleet is facing approximately \$50 million in lost revenue in 2020.

- Hawai‘i Charter Fishing
 - Charter permits have been suspended since March 2020 and vessels have tied up to comply with the governor of Hawai‘i’s statewide proclamation that requests people to stay home.
 - The social distancing limit that allows only two unrelated person to be together, combined with charter vessels that require at least two to three persons to operate, effectively limits charter companies from taking customers fishing or even going *holoholo* (out to have fun).
 - With tourism closed, so has the charter business. Fishermen have requested a timeline from the Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources for when they can reopen their businesses.
 - Some vessel operators do not qualify for unemployment.
- Non-commercial Fishing
 - Non-commercial boat fishing in Hawai‘i has been limited to two persons (more if related or in the same household). Shoreline fishing has been allowed as an essential activity, even while beaches were closed.
 - Fishermen are providing food for their families, neighbors, friends and community members since they are not working. While most fish are given away, some fishermen are able to supplement their income, especially if they are not able to work.
 - Poseidon Fisheries Research, an independent contractor that collaborates with the Council, is donating the fish they receive from non-commercial fishermen for biosampling to feed the *kupuna* (elderly) and *keiki* (children) of the Waimanalo community.
 - Hawai‘i non-commercial fishermen are attempting to quantify their production of sustainable seafood to the community during the closures and stay at home impacts of COVID-19 through the development of the Hawai‘i Fishermen Feeding Families Facebook group. Fishermen can upload photos of their catch along with an estimate of total weight and how many people those fish will feed. Students from Mid-Pacific Institute’s Exploratory Program gather the data, catalog the information and provide weekly updates to the group. From April 15 to May 6, 2020, more than 3,000 pounds of fish were caught and fed an estimated 7,000 people throughout Hawai‘i.
- **Fishing Tournaments**
 - Most tournaments have been postponed or canceled entirely statewide, some of which were fundraisers for fishing clubs.
 - Several fishermen in Hawai‘i have requested that the governor exempt fishing tournaments with plans for social distancing, online registration and canceling of mass gatherings like awards banquets.

3. Guam

HEALTH

- Guam, with a population of around 160,000, has had 154 confirmed cases and 5 deaths from COVID-19.
- Additionally, the aircraft carrier *USS Theodore Roosevelt* that had just left Guam was forced to return due to the virus. Of the carrier's more than 4,000 sailors, 1,150 tested positive and one person died as a result of the virus. The sailors who tested positive were either admitted to the island's naval hospital or sequestered on base. Those who tested negative were quarantined in several of Guam's empty hotels.

ECONOMY

- Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero issued executive orders on staying at home, business lockdown, social distancing, nonessential driving restrictions enforced through road blocks and mandatory quarantine for travelers. Cruise ships have been denied entry. Airlines have reduced or eliminated travel into Guam.
- These emergency restrictions have impacted Guam's tourism industry from East Asian countries, which has been a pillar of Guam's economy. In December 2019, there were 67,000 visitors from Japan and 71,000 from South Korea. Visitors from the United States, Taiwan, Philippines and China made up less than 10% of December 2019 arrivals. Visitors to Guam dropped to near zero due to flight suspensions.
- On May 10, malls, salons, shopping centers and flower shops were allowed to open at 50% capacity. People in public are still required to wear a face mask.

FISHERIES

- Fishing is considered an essential activity in Guam as long as social distancing is practiced. Some locations, such as Malesso Pier have been temporarily closed to help enforce this rule.
- The pandemic affected the island's recreational and subsistence fishermen the most. Other than a few charter boats, commercial fishing vessels and a single tuna transshipper, the island's fishery is comprised of these non-commercial fishermen, some of whom sell a portion of their catch to cover costs.
- Customers of locally caught fresh fish dried up. A few restaurants resorted to curbside sales combined with social media promotions while establishments are closed.
- All the charter boats, like other businesses that rely almost solely on the visitor and military markets, initially shut down operations. Employees were laid off or sought other work. Later, a few companies re-opened and implemented their own social distancing measures by limiting the number of passengers on their boats.
- The Easter season, typically the highest few weeks in the year for fish consumption in the Guam where 85% of the population is Catholic, was greatly impacted by the lack of fresh, locally caught fish. The Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (GFCA) reported an 80% decline in fish and retail sales. Community fish stores were shut most of the day and opened only when the few fishermen who supply them returned. Social media was full of comments from those sequestered at home who wanted to know where they could get fresh local fish, but with few replies.

- The long-standing annual Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources Kids' Fishing Derby scheduled for April and June 2020 at Masso Freshwater Reservoir and at the Asan War in the Pacific Beach Park, respectively, were canceled due to COVID-19. Plans for the 25th anniversary of the Guam Marianas International Fishing Derby and other summer events remain undecided.
- Although fishing activity, sales of fish and tackle shops were not on the mandatory shut down list, it is estimated that, if the impacts of the pandemic continue, Guam's fisheries will experience an annual loss of more than \$6 million in 2020.

4. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)

HEALTH

- CNMI has had 21 confirmed cases and 2 deaths related to COVID-19.

ECONOMY

- With the confirmation of two positive COVID-19 cases and the first COVID-related death at the end of March, the government suspended all international and inter-island passenger flights. As a result, the tourism industry (which employed about half of the Territory's workforce, with visitors predominantly from China and Korea) came to a complete halt.
- Since mid-March 2020 when President Trump declared a national emergency, the CNMI government took progressive actions to curb the virus's spread by implementing quarantine procedures; conducting a mass media announcement to stay home, practice proper hygiene and social distancing; mandating its employees to undergo a two-week administrative leave; closing public and private schools; implementing curfew hours for residents; and restricting public gatherings and business hours.
- The impacts of the coronavirus pandemic are especially plaguing to the CNMI, which has yet to recover economically from Typhoon Yutu, a category-5 hurricane that hit Saipan in October 2018.

FISHERIES

- Prohibitions on pelagic trolling activities, bottomfish fishing outside of the Saipan Lagoon and nighttime spear fishing (which provides approximately 95% of the reef fish sold in the local markets), along with the closure of all boat access points (reopened April 4) combined to severely restrict access to marine resources and caused the closure of retail fish markets due to lack of product.
- The CNMI resident curfew restricted early morning and late evening fishing, until it was relaxed by a couple of hours in the evening and the morning after a petition was sent by fishermen to the government.
- Many fishing tournaments have been either canceled or postponed.
- Based on data from local and federal agencies and the Council's annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation report, the CNMI government estimated that the potential financial impact that the COVID-19 pandemic may have on CNMI fishing communities if the current protective measures remain in force for one year would exceed \$3 million.