



## Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center Priorities and Annual Guidance Memo for Fiscal Year 2019

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### Purpose

The purpose of the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC or Center) Annual Guidance Memorandum (AGM) is to focus the Center's attention on several specific programmatic priorities in the coming year. The AGM attempts to balance the work that PIFSC programs conduct on NOAA and NMFS mandates and stakeholder priorities with potential annual budget scenarios. This document will also help position the Center for out-year (i.e., two- to five-year) challenges and opportunities.

### Core Values and Strategic Goals

The Center produces science to support the conservation and management of fisheries and living marine resources—studying fisheries and ocean ecosystems throughout the Pacific Islands Region, and dedicating efforts to the recovery and conservation of protected species. The PIFSC Director's Office recognizes the importance of a strong foundation from which the Center can advance organizational excellence and support individual successes while maintaining its core values of *science integrity* and *mutual respect*. The Center maintains the NOAA Fisheries strategic goals (sustain fisheries, recover and conserve protected species, improve organizational excellence) as well as a commitment to enhance the management and accessibility of our data resources. These areas continue to serve as the four pillars within which our annual priorities align. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, all PIFSC programs, projects, and investments are designed and will be conducted in a manner that supports the four Center-wide strategic goals<sup>1</sup>:

- 1) Ensure the productivity and sustainability of fisheries<sup>2</sup> and fishing communities through science-based decision-making and compliance with regulations.
- 2) Recover and conserve protected resources by using sound natural and social sciences.
- 3) Improve organizational excellence.<sup>3</sup>
- 4) Enhance the management, accessibility, and analytical capability of our data resources.

### Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Scenario

The Center's budget for the upcoming year remains uncertain, as Congress has not yet resolved the FY2019 Federal budget. For planning purposes, the current budget projection offers the prospect of a flat fiscal forecast for FY2019 and beyond. The Center will approach the scenario of an FY2019 equivalent to the FY2018 enacted budget of approximately \$25.5 million. Base budgets will focus on the highest agency priorities in FY2019 and future years. Funding for

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<sup>1</sup> Goals 1–3 are the three NMFS strategic goals and Goal 4 is a PIFSC strategic goal.

<sup>2</sup> The term “fisheries” encompasses commercial fishing, recreational and subsistence fishing, and aquaculture.

<sup>3</sup> The DOC Strategic Plan defines organizational excellence as: strengthening capacity to achieve objectives, maximizing return on program investments, and delivering quality, timely service.

lower priorities may need to be adjusted downward in order to realize additional gains for our core program activities as well as new priorities that emerge. While an uncertain budget environment has become commonplace, implementing our mission in this context remains difficult. Even with uncertain budgets, the Center will need to balance these budget realities with mission priorities and line item integrity. Line item integrity refers to ensuring that funds are spent consistent with Congressional intent (e.g., fish funds for fishery research and monitoring, protected species funds for protected species research and monitoring).

### **PIFSC Prioritization and Planning Process**

The PIFSC Board of Directors are committed to the development and implementation of a holistic planning and prioritization process to collect and review detailed information on the suite of activities proposed annually, including staffing needs, budgetary considerations, and their relevance to national and Center priorities, mandates, and mission. This year, efforts will be made to ensure that the Center's planning documents and our partners' priorities are clearly integrated into the Center's priority activities. The FY2019 priority activities (listed below) were developed by the PIFSC Science Council and ratified by the PIFSC Board of Directors, taking into consideration prior year accomplishments as well as Divisional and National priorities.

### **Fiscal Year 2019 PIFSC Priorities**

Aligned with PIFSC's core values, the following priorities aim to highlight a subset of PIFSC's planned activities in FY2019. The Center's commitment to engagement with partners, such as the Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO) and the Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council (WPRFMC), and the advancement of mutually beneficial interests in both science and management, is integrated into much of the Center's focus. Of the listed priorities, the following four (4) will be the Center's top priorities in FY2019.

- (1) Advance and complete target fisheries stock assessments and associated analyses for fishery management on important managed fish stocks, including territorial bottomfish from Guam, CNMI, and American Samoa and North Pacific striped marlin (benchmarks); and improve methods and analysis for estimating commercial, recreational, and subsistence fishery catch and effort.
- (2) Continue to refine and test the Hawaii Atlantis ecosystem model as a decision-support tool for ecosystem-based fisheries management (EBFM) by filling key data gaps, incorporating multiple ecosystem parameters such as socioeconomic and climate variability components, assessing scalability to address specific questions, and developing a qualitative conceptual model that represents the relationship between human well-being and ecosystem services.
- (3) Continue to conduct analysis on environmental drivers of olive ridley and leatherback interactions in the Hawaiian and American Samoa longline fisheries in collaboration with PIRO and the WPRFMC.
- (4) Conduct and improve the Bottomfish Fishery-Independent Survey in Hawaii.

The remaining priorities (listed in random order below) are nested within the Center's four strategic goals. Each item listed below will be tracked regionally to encourage accountability and transparency.

***(1) To ensure the productivity and sustainability of fisheries and fishing communities through science-based decision-making and compliance with regulations, the Center has prioritized the following:***

- (a) Conduct life history and size-at-age research to estimate natural and fishing mortality using vessel surveys and commercial fishery biosampling to improve stock assessments for informed management decisions.
- (b) In line with the Pacific Islands Climate Science Regional Action Plan, continue to analyze the effects of climate variability and climate change on living marine resources and human communities by defining environmental requirements of target taxa and analyzing environmental shifts over time, in support of adaptive decision processes for management.
- (c) Advance the long-term understanding of pelagic fisheries' socioeconomic and ecosystem dynamics (e.g., recruitment pulses, population variability, and size structure), considering regulatory and environmental drivers of fishing fleet behavior.
- (d) Increase compliance with fishery regulations and best practices by designing and evaluating targeted efforts to improve techniques to gather sensitive information and understand behavioral motivations.
- (e) Evaluate fishery interactions and post-hooking mortality rates by comparing them with estimated species-specific demographic parameters and, where appropriate, develop best handling guidelines for bycatch.
- (f) Complete and install the Pacific Islands Region Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management (EBFM) Implementation Plan and continue to improve the Center's Integrated Ecosystem Assessments, developing a suite of fisheries ecosystem indicators that inform science in support of ecosystem-based management.
- (g) Conduct research and monitoring activities in support of the National Coral Reef Monitoring Program by incorporating existing socioeconomic data and indicators to inform alignment with existing biophysical data streams, and explore development of broader socioeconomic monitoring framework that will allow us to detect changes in the involvement, preferences, and well-being of fishers and fishing communities over time.

***(2) To ensure the recovery and conservation of protected resources through the use of sound natural and social sciences, the Center will continue to:***

- (a) Conduct cetacean surveys and analytical efforts including the winter Hawaiian Islands Cetacean and Ecosystem Assessment Survey (HICEAS) 2019 and surveys in the Marianas, maintain the Pacific Islands Passive Acoustic Network (PIPAN), and continue development of new passive acoustic approaches to conduct long-term acoustic monitoring across the central and western Pacific, advancing cetacean assessment in the region.
- (b) Conduct Hawaiian monk seal and turtle population surveys, including summer field camp surveys in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) to assess abundance and growth trends and habitat use across Hawaii.
- (c) Conduct marine turtle population assessments for abundance and growth trends and habitat use in the broader Pacific Islands region and abroad.
- (d) Improve data collection technologies and methods for protected species population assessment including refining UAS survey efforts and developing BlueTooth technologies for animal identification.

- (e) Improve protected species health research, including research on reproductive health and physiology, and emergency intervention methodologies in support of Hawaiian monk seal conservation.

**(3) *In support of Center-wide organizational excellence, PIFSC will:***

- (a) Implement and refine PIFSC's annual planning and prioritization process.
- (b) Prioritize data analyses and summaries requested by partners and maintain an updated priority list throughout the year.
- (c) Continue to provide access to career development opportunities in-line with NOAA's Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan.
- (d) Evaluate emerging advanced technologies and improve effectiveness and efficiencies of research tools such as (1) autonomous vehicles, (2) acoustics, and (3) underwater optics to advance new ways to address the Center's mission.
- (e) Assess gaps (e.g., genetics and aquaculture) to enhance capabilities to align the Center with evolving Department of Commerce and NOAA priorities.
- (f) Support the partnership between PIFSC and the Joint Institute for Marine and Atmospheric Research (JIMAR) to improve efficiencies and leverage capacity to advance mutual interests in both organizations.

**(4) *To enhance the management, accessibility, and analysis capability of our data resources, PIFSC will:***

- (a) Expand statistical analysis capabilities to provide science advice to management.
- (b) Create a PIFSC data management governance board responsible for the creation, communication, and implementation of a data management governance model for the Center built on the principles of data integrity, reproducibility, efficiency, and accessibility.
- (c) Initiate internal workshops and audits of key PIFSC data streams to identify areas of strength, weakness, opportunities, and threats, to help promote a culture of support, collaboration, and sharing within the PIFSC data management community, and ensure integrity and accessibility of our data.
- (d) Identify and implement process improvements for data streams and ensure timely delivery of all reports and accurate replication of previously reported updates.
- (e) Conduct longline observer sampling design and estimate bycatch.