

Adapted from: Barry Smith

THE ISLANDS UNIT OF THE MARIANAS TRENCH MARINE NATIONAL MONUMENT

In 2009, President George W. Bush established the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument in the waters of the Mariana Archipelago. The monument is composed of waters and submerged lands in three management units: the Islands, Trench and Volcanic Units.

The Islands Unit is comprised of the waters surrounding the three northernmost islands - Asuncion, Maug and Uracas (also known as Farallon de Pajaros) - to a radius of 50 nm from shore. The management area is recognized as one of the most biologically diverse regions in the western Pacific, and its waters are occupied by large populations of reef fish and apex predators.

Monument designation prohibits commercial fishing in the Islands Unit but specifies allowance for the continuance of sustenance, recreational and *traditional indigenous fishing*—a term for which there is not yet a clear legal definition.

In 2011, PIFSC undertook a study to better inform managers and the public of the historical context of fishing and other activities in the vicinity of the Islands Unit.



REMEMBERING THE 13 FISHERMEN

One strong and ever-present link between the people of CNMI and the Islands Unit of the monument is the memory of the 13 fishermen who perished at sea on September 23, 1986, in Typhoon Ben. The *M.V. Olwol* sent a distress call from Agrihan in waters just south of the Islands Unit. Remnants of the vessel were found on the exterior coast of the island and it is believed that they were heading to the protective crater of Maug to shelter from the storm.

“Cause in our minds if there is a typhoon come you can always be safe inside Maug. That’s what we learned from our parents and great grandparents.”

– Fisherman

Today the fishermen are commemorated each year with memorial events and the pictured monument that stands along Beach Road in Garapan, Saipan.



Thank you, ghilissow, and si yu’os ma’ase to those who participated in this study.

We wish to thank the staff at the CNMI Department of Lands and Natural Resources (DLNR) and the CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) for their support.

NOAA Fisheries

Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center
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Human Dimensions Research Program

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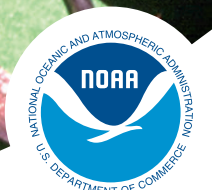
Pacific Islands Regional Office

Marine National Monuments Program (MNM)

http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/MNM/mnm_index.html



Traditional Fishing in the Islands Unit of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument





RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

During November and December of 2011, researchers from the Human Dimensions Research Program at NOAA's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center collected oral histories from key sources in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and Guam to describe traditional fishing patterns in the waters surrounding Asuncion, Maug and Uracas (the Islands Unit of the monument), in order to provide a scientific basis for managing traditional access and traditional indigenous fishing.

The objectives of this research were to:

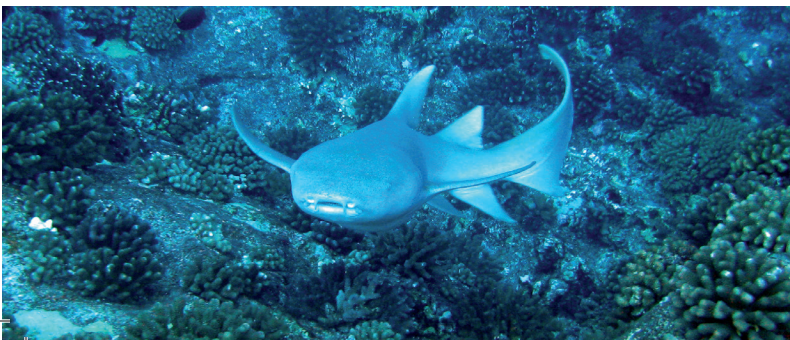
- Document past and contemporary trips to the lands and waters of the Islands Unit
- Describe the perspectives and experiences of persons participating in these trips
- Explore historical and cultural connections of residents of the CNMI and Guam to the islands and waters of the Islands Unit

Data were collected from 32 oral histories with 40 persons, representing:

- 27 oral histories collected individually and 5 in groups
- 35 male and 5 female participants
- 38 residents of Saipan and 2 residents of Guam

Oral history contributors were:

- Residents who traveled to and fished in the Islands Unit of the monument
- Residents with strong personal/familial connections to the northernmost islands of the Mariana Archipelago
- Government officials and researchers



TRIP ACCOUNTS TO THE ISLANDS UNIT WATERS

Oral histories accounted for a minimum estimate of 129 trips to the Islands Unit waters from 1939-2010 and **3.8 trips per year** from 1979-2010. Trips were undertaken for various reasons including fishing, exploring, research, tourism or delivering supplies to the Northern Islands.

- On **98%** of trips, fishing took place.
- On **93%** of trips, fish was brought back for sharing.
- On **67%** of trips, fish was brought back and sold.

Primary Purpose of Trip	# of Trip Accounts	Years	Fish Sold To Recover Expenses of Trip	Fish Sold Beyond Expenses of Trip
Fishing	73	1979-2009	22%	77%
Visit/Explore	6	1989-2009	67%	0%
Research	30	1980-2010	0%	20%
Charter (tourist)	4	1995-2005	0%	0%
Charter (other)	4	1997-2010	0%	75%
Resupply	12	1939-1945	0%	0%
TOTAL	129	1939-2010	16%	51%

"If you go up there and don't fish, you don't go up there at all."

– Fisherman



CULTURAL CONNECTIONS TO THE NORTHERN ISLANDS

Many participants expressed strong cultural connections to all of the Northern Mariana Islands including the three northernmost, Asuncion, Maug and Uracas.

- For those who had traveled to the region, a sense of wonder and awe was evident in their accounts of the area.

"Something really new, it's like you're discovering, exploring something very different from out here. It makes you feel like you are actually an islander."

– Boat Owner

"Any chance I get I'll go up there... Like, your mind is completely free... never seen anything like that."

– Fisherman

- Fish brought back from the Northern Islands has traditionally provided a unique food source and a continued connection to the islands for those who cannot visit themselves.

"Older people are dying off now but what they ask for mostly is please get me this kind of fish... They want to eat the fish that they ate when they were younger, which... you just can't find it around here."

– Boat Owner

- Many contributors also valued the Islands Unit for its *existence value*, or the value of knowing that it exists without directly experiencing it.

- Some participants referred to the Northern Islands as an integral part of their home.



KEY FINDINGS

- Trips to the Islands Unit are rare because the logistics and expense of getting to and from the Islands Unit can be prohibitive.
- Perspectives vary on what constitutes commercial fishing. The Magnuson-Stevens Act defines any fisherman selling fish as commercial, but such labels are not always so strictly interpreted in some communities.

"It doesn't seem to fully fit in with the culture out here... some of them simply sell some of their catch to recoup some money and then keep the fish or give the fish to their family. Now is he a commercial fisherman? I would say no. But Magnuson Stevens says yes. It's not so cut and dry out here."

– Researcher

- When asked about the distribution of their catch, all fishermen relayed accounts of sharing and selling fish within their local communities. Even among fishermen fishing for primarily commercial purposes, most shared substantial amounts of fish with family and community.
- Traditionally, Mariana fishermen have sold fish caught in the Islands Unit waters of the monument to recover trip costs. Without the sale of fish, trip expenses may be prohibitive enough to restrict access to the northernmost islands to all but the wealthy.
- Although most residents have never visited the Islands Unit, there is still a mindful connection to their presence and value.

