

Australian Underwater Federation Spearfishing

Inter-Pacific Spearfishing Championships, Guam 2017



History of the competition

Formally known as the tripartite and comprising of three spear fishing nations this competition has developed into the biggest international spear fishing tournament in the southern hemisphere. Starting in 1977 with Australia, New Caledonia and New Zealand, Tahiti joined the competition soon after and in recent years Hawaii and Guam have taken up the challenge to strengthen this prestigious international event. Australia has won the Inter-Pacific 10 times (5 in Australia, 4 in NZ, 1 in Hawaii) but has never won in New Caledonia or Tahiti. This year was the first time Guam has hosted the event.

The Beautiful Island of Guam





Guam is a single island and unincorporated territory of the United States in the north Pacific Ocean, the largest, most populous, and southernmost of the Mariana Islands. It lies about 9,300 km west of San Francisco and 2,600 km east of Manila. The island is sharply divided into a northern limestone plateau with a general elevation of about 150 metres and a higher area of volcanic hills to the south. Guam has a pleasant tropical climate tempered by the northeast trade winds and the north equatorial ocean current that flows west across the Pacific. Temperatures range between approximately 20 and 30° and are fairly even throughout the year. Average annual precipitation is about 2,400 mm, 75% of which falls in storms during the wet season, generally starting in May or June and lasting through November.

Native Guamanians, ethnically called Chamorros, are of basically Malayo-Indonesian descent with a considerable admixture of Spanish, Filipino, Mexican, and other European and Asian ancestries. Chamorros and other Micronesians constitute about half the population. Tourism is the most prominent component of the economy, with more than a million visitors arriving per year. There are several luxury hotels along Tumon Bay, which has been highly developed as a tourist area. An international airport links Guam with other Pacific islands, Asia, and Hawaii and the continental United States. The U.S. armed forces are represented at multiple military facilities on Guam. Andersen Air Force Base and its annexes are concentrated at the northern end of the island. U.S. Navy facilities, located around the island, include a naval air station, a naval base with a ship repair yard, communications centres and a hospital.

The water temperature for late March was around 27 degrees with no thermocline. The reef edge drops quickly to very deep water and underwater visibility varies from 5m in the lagoons and passes to over 50m over the drop offs. Our accommodation was at the Garden Villa Hotel and four of the other teams stayed at the same hotel. Shops were within walking distance and we dined out most nights and the food was great!

The Aussie team

The Australian team was put together through a call from the AUF for expressions of interest for divers and team managers. This proved challenging due to the commitment of an Aussie contingent to compete at the U.S. National Championships in May, however a team with a mix of old and new divers was formed.

The Australian men's team was managed by Dave Welch and the women's team was managed by Joe Martindale. The women's team was Taylah Martindale and Kate Rogers while the men's team was Michael Pannach, Jack Lavender, Michael Craperi and Dan Byrne. There was no reserve as there has been in previous years. Taylah has represented Australia at the Inter-Pacifics for the last five years and was part of the winning women's team two years ago. Jack and Mick P. both have four Inter-Pacifics under their belts and for Michael Craperi and Dan Byrne it was the first time representing Australia.



Left to right: Dan Byrne, Jack Lavender, Joe Martindale, Kate Rogers, Taylah Martindale, Michael Pannach, Michael Craperi and Dave Welch

The Rules

The Inter-Pacific spearfishing competition is a team based pairs event for 4 men (two pairs) and 2 women (1 pair) from each country. The competition is generally held over six days with an opening ceremony, two scouting days, a rest day, two competition days, followed by the closing ceremony. The rules allow a reserve diver to be substituted on the second day. Competition days comprise a 6-hour swim with each pair towing a float. There must always be one diver on the surface and within 4m of the float while the other is below and divers must ensure they stay within 40m of each other at all times. Divers may use a rig line but most prefer to be unattached and use a reel so they can swim more silently and freely. The fish that are speared are placed on the float to prevent losing fish to sharks.

The fish list provided by the host country was complicated with 86 species and 5 weight categories (300g, 350g, 500g, 1000g and 2500g). The scoring is based on 100 points per eligible fish and 10 points per kilogram with the men limited to 4 fish per eligible species and 2 for the women. There were five additional species allowed for women only with a 250g minimum weight. The team managers spend competition days aboard safety boats with a local captain, and collect fish to ensure limits aren't exceeded and provide food, drink, spare gear and general communication. Safety boats cannot tend to divers in the first hour of competition.



Dinner at a Thai restaurant.

Scouting

We arrived in Guam five days prior to the competition to allow extra time for scouting the proposed competition zones and identifying certain fish from the species list provided. The weather was magic for the lead up to the competition with crystal clear waters and light winds. The host event organizer, James Borja, had arranged two boats for the duration of our stay. Julian was skipper of the women's boat and we had the legend Mike James. We couldn't have asked for better skippers as both had good local knowledge of the island and the five proposed locations, and Mike insisted on cooking our lunches for us each day so that we could sample some of the local food.

Zone 1 to the north of the island was known for strong currents. Zone 2 and 3 were the most sheltered with zone 4 at the southern end of the island a likely hotspot and known for good fish on the point where two currents met. Zone 5 was to the south-east corner of the island and again exposed to strong currents. Trade winds are generally from the north-east so proposed zones most likely to be dived were zones 2, 3 and 4. We got a heads up that zone 2 and 4 were the best and most likely zones for the comp days so our first day scouting was at zone 4 (Coco's). We spent 1.5 days scouting Coco's and 1.5 days scouting zone 2. Mike our skipper told us zone 3 was very flat and not so good with fish only in certain places or out deep. As the comp got closer the weather forecast started changing for the worst which saw us allocate a day to scout zone 3 which turned out to be a wise decision.

Two of the men divers were new to the team so we also used these scouting days to work together, swimming in different pairs and holding mini comps within ourselves to refine teamwork and gear and recover fish for identifying and weighing. At the end of everyday the teams would have a de-brief and discuss where certain fish were holding up in the shallows or out deep and try to analyze a plan for each zone. We found the fish to be small and very flighty. Spearfishing at night is a very common fishing method in Guam and so the fish were very wary of divers in the water. Like many places these days the shallows had been overfished with most fish out in very deep waters. Goatfish, soldierfish and sabre squirrelfish we found difficult to weigh as they are a small fish and had to be 300g. Small-toothed job fish and the sling-jawed wrasse were fairly common with a weight of 350g and again hard to weigh. There were two species of rudderfish (drummer), high fin and low fin rudderfish, and were typically found up on the reef in the white water, however some were found out wide. There were 14 different species of parrotfish on the list and were hard to hunt. The tan-faced parrot, star-eye parrot and yellow band parrot were the most commonly sighted usually found in the shallows.

One fish that proved challenging to identify were the gray unicorn fish (see photo below) and the black unicorn fish. Both fish were found on the drop off and appear similar. They appear greyish blue in the water and can also have dark spots but when they die turn dark in colour. We put these unicorns on ice to ask some of the Guamanians back on land the difference between the two fish and upon removing from the esky they had changed back to blue again. We found this to be normal for the gray unicorn fish and distinguished that the black unicorn fish, while generally bigger in size, also has a distinctive yellow area on the bottom half of the fish. Both unicorn fish species were generally in very deep water, especially after being hunted. Big eye emperor were showing their presence at most zones with a few being landed after lying on the bottom for some time.



Identifying fish species

Mike James our skipper kindly made our lunches for us each day with a different local menu everyday with wahoo curry, pork chops, chicken drumsticks and venison stew to name a few. Each dish was accompanied with a side of rice and coconut water to keep us hydrated.



Venison stew with the crew

Opening Ceremony

The evening of the opening ceremony was kindly hosted at James Borja's sisters mansion right up on a hill overlooking Guam. It was an amazing venue where the teams could sit out on the big deck, have a few drinks and catch up with friends old and new. Many photos and stories were being exchanged but you could still feel the tension as this was the first official day of the competition. As the sun began to set the Tahitian's opened the banquet with a song and a prayer. The spread of food was amazing with plenty to go around. There was even dessert for any one with a sweet tooth. As the night came to a close and everyone's hunger was satisfied, each team had their photo taken and every team member given a Guam souvenir bag to take away.



Sunset drinks overlooking Guam



Sashimi - Ruby Snapper (Onagas) James caught deep drop fishing in 300m for the opening banquet

Competition Day 1

The weather leading into the competition for the scouting days couldn't have been any better. We were monitoring the weather forecast which was showing 15 -20 knots for the comp days with the swell building to 2 metres. The evening before the competition the team managers had a briefing and it was decided that zone 2 would be the safest and the most sheltered for day 1, with a start time of 0830. As we had invested 1.5 days scouting this zone we were pretty confident and devised a plan ready for the morning. It was agreed we would be launching from the Agana boat ramp about 20 minutes drive from the hotel.

The morning dawned and we were greeted with 25 knot winds from the NE, patchy rain and a heavy swell. Our legendary skippers had the boats in the water ready to go but the swell was breaking in the channel making it unable to launch. A quick meeting saw a change to zone 4 (Coco's) and launching from Agat boat ramp another 20 minutes drive south. After retrieving the boats a debrief was held at the new boat ramp, then all the boats followed one another to Coco's with each team revising new strategies. The VHF radio was alive with concerns about the conditions as we got closer to the point. The conditions were pretty wild and unfavorable as we arrived so Plan C was to go back to the only available area, zone 3.

Zone 3 stretched about 5km along the coastline with markers at each end and a starting buoy in the middle of the zone. James announced a new start time of 0950. All the boats were lined up with divers in the water. We had planned that Michael Pannach and Michael Craperi would swim to the northernmost point where some good fish were seen in the shallow bay and some good deep fish also, while Dan and Jack would swim a short distance south to two bommies we found on scouting day in only 20-25m that were holding very good fish. There was a slight current traveling south and an outgoing tide with the visibility about 15m affected by the sandy bay in the middle of the zone and the runoff from the rain.

Dan and Jack missed the two bommies due to the dirtier water but found a good bommie in very deep water where they spent the first 2 hours landing a couple of

big rudder fish and a big eye trevally. This was challenging as Team Tahiti were diving exactly the same bommie. Team New Caly and the Tahitians were shooting good fish too. Fish became wary and pushed deeper into 30-35m so the boys decided to head shallow in 12-18m and managed to pick up parrots, soldier fish, blue fin trevally and sling-jawed wrasse. Dave was coming up to us about every hour and taking our fish and weighing them and giving us an update of how our team was going as well as other teams and giving us plenty to drink. Taylah and Kate had scouted the shallows and spent their duration hunting in a depth of 8m to literally on top of the reef, landing some good rudderfish and mullet. The two Mike's dived their way to the northern marker managing to pick up some good bigeye emperor, soldier fish, a peacock grouper, surgeons and a goat fish. They found it hard finding fish as they worked the shallows to the northern marker so they started working the 25-35m depth where they started seeing good fish. However, time was running out and they realised they had a good 2km swim back to the starting buoy or risk the team being disqualified. The boys made a remarkable effort, spurred on by the managers boat the whole way, swimming hard and just making it to back to the starting buoy with 40 seconds to spare. Their swim was truly an epic one and the training paid off.

At the weigh in the top catch was by the Tahitian men's and women's teams and New Caledonia who just beat NZ by 2 fish. The local team followed NZ then Australia who shot 19 fish with 15 eligible to weigh followed by Hawaii. Taylah and Kate did well weighing 4 fish and placing 2nd behind the Tahitian women with 9 fish.



Divers waiting at the starting buoy on Day 1 of the competition.

Competition Day 2

The weather conditions for day 2 were much the same as the day before with talks of running the comp in the same zone again or proposing a whole new zone. A team managers meeting voted to have a whole new zone which limited us to using the southern marker of zone 3 as the northern marker for the new zone. The zone would run 5 km to the south towards Coco's island on the sheltered side of the reef edge. The starting buoy was deployed with some divers fatigued but ready to go, with a start time of 0900. The tide was outgoing with a slight current heading south towards the point. We had held mini comps in the new proposed zone in the lead up days so luckily we had some knowledge of the area.

The waves were breaking in the lagoon which would then taper off to a nice ledge in 30-40m where the good fish were then again drop off to deep blue water.

Our plan had Mick Craperi and Jack to swim hard to get the lead on the pack and then work the ledge down to the southern marker. Mick Pannach and Dan would work the shallows also heading south looking for rudderfish and parrots and also cover ground around the 15-25m depth. Taylah and Kate headed north hunting around the 8-15m depth and shooting 11 fish of good variety. Mick and Jack did well along the ledge landing some good surgeons, rudder fish, parrots, rainbow runner, lyre tail grouper, squirrelfish, sling-jaw and soldierfish. Jack shot a small dogtooth tuna on the reef and this was the biggest one of the competition and a nice catch. They also had two big wahoo swim up to them in the shallows but they stayed out of range. Mick and Dan found it quiet in the shallows but recovered some rudder fish, humpback snapper, squirrelfish, soldierfish, sling-jaw wrasse and parrot fish. Michael Pannach also shot a nice bluefin trevally close to the ledge in 27m. Mick and Dan swam wide in the last hour with the flasher and saw a couple of dolphinfish but they didn't stay around. Both pairs slowly worked their way back against the current giving themselves enough time to make it to the finish avoiding the last minute swim. Both pairs also worked right up to the last minute and were the last pair back to the finish buoy.

At the weigh in our Australian women's team shot 11 fish with 6 eligible to be weighed and beating the Tahitian girls by 1 fish – a fantastic effort. The Australian men were happy with 19 fish and we were outclassed by the deep diving ability and knowledge of the Tahitian men's who got 37 fish on day 1 and 34 fish on day 2 earning them a 200% total score.



Men's team catch on Day 2.



Our women's team, Kate Rogers and Taylah Martindale, who finished in 2nd place with an outstanding effort.

Overall Results

2017 Inter-Pacific Spearfishing Championships
30-31 March 2017 Hagatna, Guam

Men's Competition

Team	Day 1				Day 2				TOTAL	
	Fish	Wt (kg)	Points	Percentage	Fish	Wt (kg)	Points	Percentage	Points	Percentage
1 TAHITI	37	31.84	4,018.40	100.00%	34	20.72	3,607.20	100.00%	7,625.60	200.00%
2 NEW ZEALAND	27	21.68	2,916.80	72.59%	32	22.54	3,425.40	94.96%	6,342.20	167.55%
3 NEW CALEDONIA	29	26.42	3,164.20	78.74%	28	19.88	2,998.80	83.13%	6,163.00	161.88%
4 GUAM	21	23.44	2,334.40	58.09%	30	16.00	3,160.00	87.60%	5,494.40	145.70%
5 AUSTRALIA	15	11.36	1,613.60	40.16%	19	17.34	2,073.40	57.48%	3,687.00	97.63%
6 HAWAII	12	16.88	1,368.80	34.06%	5	8.48	584.80	16.21%	1,953.60	50.28%

Women's Competition

Team	Day 1				Day 2				TOTAL	
	Fish	Wt (kg)	Points	Percentage	Fish	Wt (kg)	Points	Percentage	Points	Percentage
1 TAHITI	9	7.70	977.0	100.00%	5	2.04	520.40	83.42%	1,497.40	183.42%
2 AUSTRALIA	4	1.78	417.8	42.76%	6	2.38	623.80	100.00%	1,041.60	142.76%
3 NEW ZEALAND	2	1.52	215.2	22.03%	2	1.12	211.20	33.86%	426.40	55.88%
4 GUAM	2	0.58	205.8	21.06%	2	1.30	213.00	34.15%	418.80	55.21%

Closing Ceremony

Saturday was the last day of the trip with the closing ceremony from 5pm. If nine days diving wasn't enough the team backed it up with a morning blue water leisure dive before the closing ceremony in hopes of spearing a doggie, wahoo or dolphin fish. We saw some good wahoo and lost a nice one to rigging failure. The boys shot some rainbow runner for burley and we saw smaller doggies 10-15kg come through. A nice dolphin fish came through and we managed to land it for Mike's dinner. Taylah landed her first wahoo so she was super stoked and Joe shot a nice dolphin fish as well. The water was amazing with light showers coming through and a spectacular rainbow.

The closing ceremony was held down by the harbour with a huge smorgasbord of local food and delicacies, followed by about 2 hours of speeches and presentations. The Tahitians opened the night again with a song and blessed the food. Some of the foods were: fish presented in many ways, chicken, venison, pig on the spit, yam, taro, breadfruit, coconut rice, delicious salads, vegetables, fruit and a few unidentifiable dishes all of which were amazing. This was the first time the event has been held in Guam and talking to some of the other teams they said it was quite possibly one of the hardest competitions. Most teams departed the next day, some very early the following morning with a 4am rise for most of our team. After the ceremony we went into town with the NZ crew for a few Pepsi's and some laughs before the early rise and journey back home. It was a great experience for all of us with many good memories!



Gotta be big rainbow runner at the end of that rainbow



Most of the competitors at the 2017 Inter-Pacific Championships.

Cost and Sponsors

It is fairly expensive to travel and stay in Guam and they use US currency. There are many costs shared by the team members including flights at between \$1200 and \$2000 per person with some excess baggage costs, boat hire for scouting days at \$250 per day, accommodations, meals, team shirts, t-shirts as gifts for the competing team members, an Inter-Pacific ritual, and each country pays a sign on fee to the organizers for all the competition expenses.

The opportunity to represent our country in the sport we love is truly an honor and a special lifelong memory and it would not be possible without the unwavering support each year from the many sponsors, many who provide support every year. The major sponsor of the team was the Australian Underwater Federation and team members also organized a fundraiser raffle to help with additional costs. Some great dive gear prizes were won from many who showed their kindness and support and we are eternally grateful to all those who supported us by buying raffle tickets.

We are especially grateful to those sponsors who provided the prizes for the raffle and those who also provided cash support to the team:

Adreno
Apex
AUF National
AUF QLD
Aimrite
Madfish
Aussie Reels
Pilbara Ports Authority
R Torelli, (Sue Torelli)
Reel Cray Zee Charters
Torelli. (Paul Dorfstader)
Mannysub

Evolve Carbon Pole Spears
Edge Superfrog
Townsville City Council
Huntmaster
Newcastle Neptunes
Salvimar
Yazbeck
West Australian Undersea Club
Townsville Skindiving Club

Last but not least the many who contributed significantly in the fundraiser.

**Thank you very much for your continued support!
Without you our task would be almost impossible to fund.**



What we learned that will help the next Australian team:

- 1 Team members must study and know the fish species (including local names) very well. Some of the species we found very difficult to weigh such as the squirrelfish varieties (300g), most of the goat fish and the sling jaw wrasse. It was better to concentrate on species that would weigh and not efficient to chase and spear these marginal species. Take scales on trip!
- 2 Minimize your dive gear, spares and clothes. Aim for 20-25kg luggage per person. Arrange beforehand to borrow or hire weights and floats from locals if

possible.

- 3 Only use gear that you are comfortable with and don't use a new longer gun. Most divers used a 1.3m for the deeper diving and a small 0.9m gun for hunting in shallow water and caves. Dive the shallows early and late in a competition and focus on catching rudders, mullet, trevally, tan faced parrots and some of the deep water species can just as easily be speared in 2m such as paddle tail, squirrel fish, soldier fish and ring tail surgeons. Check your gun does not have a safety and your spear is sharp and straight and rubbers, bridles and line are in good condition. We noticed that locals used 6mm shafts and we normally use 7mm. Small shafts small fish. Clear water longer and faster shot!
- 4 Communicate with other countries and locals to learn about the area, fish, techniques and conditions. Make a plan for the competition so that you work as a team and maximise catch.
- 5 Look after your physical and mental health including hydration, sleep, and nutrition and have fun and don't stress.
- 6 Select the manager and team as early as possible and have a fit team with some experience and skill for the conditions. Ideally we should select a team 12 months in advance rather than 1-3 months. Focus on CO2 tolerances. Swim with dive fins when training and keep swimming. If you think your ready keep swimming. Train safely for depth 30m +
- 7 Raise sponsorship early.
- 8 The 2018 event is in Hawaii with dates yet to be announced.

End Report.