



Managers Recommend Solutions to Address Pacific Bigeye Tuna Quotas for US Longliners

KAILUA-KONA (25 July 2009) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, concluded its four-day meeting today at the King Kamehameha Beach Hotel in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii, with recommendations to ensure the viability of longline fisheries managed by the Council under the Pelagics Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Western Pacific Region. Pacific tuna catches are additionally subject to the international management measures of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) in the Western and Pacific Ocean and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) in the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

As Participating Territories to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Convention, American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) have bigeye catch limits of 2,000 mt each and no quota of bigeye catch if undertaking a program of responsible fishery development. Utilization of these bigeye limits through the implementation of domestic chartering arrangements has been addressed by the WCPFC but has so far been precluded by the US territories due to the current regulatory structure of the Pelagics FMP. The Council will take final action at its October 2009 meeting on such amendments to the Pelagics FMP as may be necessary to more effectively utilize these limits, such as allowing US Participating Territories to enter into agreements and arrangements with US fishing vessels and US fishing entities.

The Council additionally recommended that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) proposed rule on the WCPFC catch limit for bigeye tuna by longline fisheries for 2009-2011 be modified so it is consistent with established practices where catch is attributed to the vessel's permit rather than its landing location. During public testimony, fishermen said vessels permitted under the US limited entry program for American Samoa have landed in the Cook Islands, due to better infrastructure there, and the landings were attributed as an American Samoa catch. Likewise, Hawaii permitted longline vessels finding themselves closer to the US West Coast than Honolulu, have landed in California, with the catch attributed as a Hawaii catch.

The Council will consider additional amendments to the Pelagics Fishery FMP at its October 2009 meeting to maintain the continuity of the Hawaii longline fishery while staying within WCPFC and IATTC quotas, via mechanisms including but not limited to trip limits or a temporary fishery closure based on a percentage of the quota being landed. The Hawaii fishery will be limited to 3,763 mt of bigeye tuna annually in 2009, 2010 and 2011 under the WCPFC and is limited to 500 mt in 2009 by the IATTC. The WCPFC quota represents a 10% reduction in the Hawaii catch based upon a WCPFC specified historical baseline. As a potential longer term solution, the Council will work with NMFS to explore the need for and the feasibility of a limited access privilege program, a type of catch shares, for the Hawaii longline fishery.

Among other Council recommendations for pelagic fisheries are the following:

Cross Seamount and NOAA Weather Buoy Fisheries: The Council will review fishery data as part of the process to consider a total allowable catch from the Cross Seamount for both tuna and monchong. The Council determined that a limited entry program is not warranted at this time for fisheries operating at Cross Seamount or at the NOAA weather buoys in offshore waters around Hawaii.

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Management of Shortlines in the Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI): The Council, at its October 2009 meeting, will consider management alternatives for shortlines, which are currently allowed to operate within the current MHI longline area closure (from the shore out to 50 or 75 miles depending on the location and season). Longlines measure over 1 mile in length, while shortlines are shorter than 1 mile in length.

American Samoa Recreational Fisheries: The Council recommended that the American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources consider establishing a voluntary recreational fisheries logbook program for boat based recreational fishing.

Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs) around Guam: The Council recommended that NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center assist the Guam Department of Agriculture in planning the appropriate location of additional FADs with respect to bathymetry, currents and proximity to boat ramps and small boat harbors.

Research: The Council endorsed a variety of cooperative research projects and recommended that gear research in American Samoa to minimize sea turtle interactions focus on the impact of larger hooks and larger bait on albacore catch rates. The Council also recommended that a comprehensive proposal be developed for a tagging study on large female blue marlin at Kona, Hawaii, and elsewhere.

The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council was established by the US Congress to manage fisheries in offshore waters around Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, CNMI and the US Pacific remote island areas. Decisions made by the Council are transmitted to the US Secretary of Commerce for final approval. For more information, visit www.wpcouncil.org or contact the Council at (808) 522-8220 (phone), (808) 522-8226 (fax) or email info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov.

Council Members: Secretary of Commerce appointees nominated by Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa and CNMI governors: William Sword, recreational fisherman/civil engineer/manager (American Samoa); Stephen Haleck, business owner (hotel and gas station) (American Samoa) (Vice Chair); Manuel Duenas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam) (Vice Chair); Frederick Duerr, resort and hotel consultant (Hawaii) (Vice Chair); Peter Young, environmental consultant (Hawaii); David Itano, researcher (Hawaii); Sean Martin, Pacific Ocean Producers (Hawaii) (Chair); and Benigno Sablan, cultural practitioner (CNMI) (Vice Chair). Designated state officials: Ignacio Dela Cruz, CNMI Department of Land & Natural Resources; Joseph Torres, Guam Department of Agriculture; Laura Thielen, Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources; and Ray Tulafono, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources. Designated federal officials: Bill Robinson, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office; Jerry Leinecke, U.S. Fish and Wildlife; RAdm Manson K. Brown, District Commander, U.S. Coast Guard 14th District; and Bill Gibbons-Fly, U.S. Department of State.