



# Press Release

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## Scientists Suggest No Change to Hawaii Tuna Longline Management Despite Projections of Western Pacific Catch Limits Being Reached in November

HONOLULU (9 October 2010) Scientists from throughout the Pacific concluded their three-day meeting in Honolulu yesterday with a suite of recommendations on federal management of fisheries in Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and the US Pacific Remote Island Areas. The recommendations by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) will be forwarded to the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, which is scheduled to convene 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Oct. 12 to 14, 2010, at the Laniakea YWCA-Fuller Hall, 1040 Richards St., Honolulu. Eric Schwaab, assistant administrator for NOAA Fisheries, is scheduled to open the Council meeting on Oct. 12. Council recommendations are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval. Recommendations on major agenda items made by the SSC include the following:

- **Hawaii Longline Bigeye Tuna Catch Limit Management:** The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has published a proposed rule to limit the catch of bigeye tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean by U.S. longline vessels at 3,763 mt (8,278,600 lbs) annually through 2011. This is consistent with the recommendations of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), to which the United States is a party. In 2009, the fishery reached its bigeye quota on Dec. 29<sup>th</sup>. The most recent projections by NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) indicate that the quota this year will be reached in mid-November. The SSC discussed the option of changing the fishing year for the Hawaii longline fishery, which currently aligns with the calendar year. After considering the following findings among others, the SSC recommended that no action be taken on this item and that the fishing year remain aligned with the calendar year:
  - Fishermen did not seem to be significantly interested in changing the fishing season;
  - In the event that a closure occurs prior to the holiday season, dealers can potentially obtain fish from outside of Hawaii and from Hawaii-based fishermen operating in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, and consumers will, therefore, be able to obtain fish during the holiday season;
  - It seems that altering the fishing season would not improve fleet-wide annual revenue; and
  - Other management entities, such as the WCPFC and Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, require reporting on a calendar year, and any changes to the fishing season from a calendar year would require additional monitoring and reporting costs.
- **Hawaii Bottomfish:** Recent research indicates that opakapaka (Hawaii pink snapper) at their maximum size of about 25 inches may be up to two times older than previously thought. PIFSC Director Samuel Pooley reported that recent results from radioisotope methods on samples of larger specimens from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands suggest that the fish are 40 to 45 years old at this size. Previously, they were believed to be 20 to 25 years old. These data will lead to a reassessment of the resilience of this species to fishing pressure.
- **American Samoa Longline Large-Vessel Closed Area:** Currently, pelagic fishing vessels greater than 50 feet in length are prohibited from fishing out to approximately 50 nautical miles offshore from the islands in the American Samoa archipelago. This prohibited area was implemented in 2002 to separate large and small vessels. The American longline fishery prior to 2002 was comprised primarily of small artisanal longliners, known locally as alia. Despite the closed area and a limited entry program established in 2004, the alia fleet has declined to only one alia operating in 2009 and 2010. In January

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2009, a US Presidential proclamation established the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument and closed about 9,000 square nautical miles to commercial fishing. While the monument area overlays the current large-pelagic fishing vessel area closure for the most part, incongruence occurs on the northern, eastern and southern boundaries. Considering the change in the fishery to a large monohull fleet along with the additional closed fishing areas created by the monument, the SSC recommended that the large pelagic fishing vessel area closure be reduced on the northern boundary and enlarged on the eastern boundary to be consistent with the marine monument boundary, but that the southern boundary remain as is. These changes would make an additional 2,500 square nautical miles of ocean available for fishermen, which would compensate fishermen for the loss about 1,700 square nautical miles of ocean due to the incongruence of the eastern and southern boundaries of the monument.

- **Process for Establishing Annual Catch Limits:** The Council is required by the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to specify the method it will use to determine the occurrence of overfishing of a stock or stock complex. The SSC recommended the Council use the maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT) for this determination. The SSC also noted that the Council could use the overfishing limit (OFL) as a trigger to conduct a new stock assessment and to set a more current MFMT. It was noted that the MFMT is derived from stock status parameters estimated from a stock assessment model fit to a time series of data generally covering the history of the fishery. In contrast, OFL is based on a forecasted estimate of biomass often two or more years beyond the first year of the data used in the stock assessment. Forecasts inherently have high uncertainty. The SSC also recommended that the Council adopt a risk of overfishing range of 0 percent to  $\leq 50$  percent and a qualitative mechanism for choosing the risk of overfishing.

As part of the Council meeting, a free Fishers Forum will be held 6 to 9 p.m. Oct. 12, 2010, at the Aloha Tower Marketplace. Open to fishermen, ocean users and the general public, “Marine Spatial Planning: Fishermen and Ocean User Perspectives” will feature informational booths, a panel discussion, a public forum and more. It addresses President Obama’s program to zone the ocean for different uses, including emerging offshore energy and aquaculture ventures. Free validated parking at Aloha Tower Marketplace or Topa Center. For more information or the agendas, visit [www.wpcouncil.org](http://www.wpcouncil.org) or email [info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov](mailto:info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov); phone (808) 522-8220, or fax (808) 522-8226.

**Scientific and Statistical Committee:** Dr. Stewart Allen (NMFS PIFSC), Dr. Judith Amesbury (Micronesian Archeological Research Services), Dr. Brian Bowen (Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology), Dr. Paul Callaghan (University of Guam retired), Dr. Frank A. Camacho (University of Guam), Dr. Milani Chaloupka (University of Queensland), Dr. Charles Daxboeck (BioDax Consulting Tahiti), Dr. Richard Deriso (Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission), Dr. John Hampton (Secretariat of the Pacific Community), Dr. Pierre Kleiber (NMFS PIFSC), Dr. Donald Kobayashi (NMFS PIFSC), Dr. Molly Lutcavage (University of New Hampshire), Dr. Minling Pang (NMFS PIFSC), Dr. Marlowe Sabater (American Samoa Marine & Wildlife Resources Department), Dr. Craig Severance (University of Hawaii retired), Dr. John Sibert (Pelagic Fisheries Research Program retired), Dr. Robert Skillman (NMFS PIFSC retired) and Mr. Michael Trianni (Northern Mariana Islands Division of Fish & Wildlife).

**Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council:** Appointees by the Secretary of Commerce from nominees selected by Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa and CNMI governors: Stephen Haleck, business owner (American Samoa) (Chair); William Sword, recreational fisherman (American Samoa) (Vice Chair); Manuel Duenas, Guam Fishermen’s Cooperative Association (Guam) (Vice Chair); David Itano, researcher (Hawaii) (Vice Chair); Benigno Sablan, cultural practitioner (CNMI) (Vice Chair); Frederick Duerr, resort and hotel consultant (Hawaii); Julie Leialoha, environmentalist (Hawaii); and Sean Martin, Pacific Ocean Producers (Hawaii). Designated state officials: Ignacio Dela Cruz, CNMI Department of Land & Natural Resources; Joe 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: Michael Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office; Don Palawski, U.S. Fish and Wildlife; RAdm Stephen Mehling, District Commander, U.S. Coast Guard 14th District; and Bill Gibbons-Fly, U.S. Department of State.