



Fishery Managers to Consider Changes to American Samoa Pelagic Fisheries

HONOLULU (2 March 2011) The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council and its advisory bodies will begin a week-long series of meetings this Friday in Pago Pago, American Samoa, to make recommendations on the management of American Samoa's large pelagic vessel and longline fisheries and other federally managed fisheries in the US Pacific Islands. The American Samoa Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee will meet 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on March 4 at the Governor Lee Auditorium; the American Samoa Archipelago and Pacific Pelagic Advisory Panels will meet 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. March 5 at Sadie's by the Sea; the American Samoa Archipelago Plan Team will meet 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on March 7 at the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources; and the Council's Executive and Budget Standing Committee will meet 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. on March 7 at Sadie's by the Sea. Recommendations from these and other advisory bodies, such as the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), which met last week in Honolulu, will be considered by the Council 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. March 8 to 10 at the Governor Lee Auditorium. Major agenda items include the following:

- **American Samoa Large Pelagic Vessel Fishery:** Pelagic fishing vessels >50 feet in length are prohibited from fishing out to approximately 50 nautical miles offshore from the islands in the 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 alias. Despite the closed area and a limited entry program established in 2004, the alia fleet has declined to only one operational vessel in 2009 and 2010. In addition, the boundaries of this closed area are incongruent with the boundaries of the recently created 10,362 square nautical-mile Rose Atoll Marine National Monument (MNM), which closed an additional 1,800 square nautical miles to commercial fishing. At its October 2010 meeting in Honolulu, the Council took initial action to modify the American Samoa large pelagic fishing vessel area closure to minimize incongruence with the Rose Atoll MNM. This action would maintain protection of the various banks and seamounts important for the American Samoa troll and sports fisheries and temporarily reduce the large pelagic vessel area closure around Swains Island to 25 nautical miles. The Council is scheduled to take final action on this issue on March 10.
- **American Samoa longline limited entry program modifications** would establish two class size categories (small and large) instead of four class size categories; reduce the three-year minimum landing requirement to 500 lbs of managed pelagic fish for the small vessel category and maintain the requirement of 5,000 lbs for the large vessel category; and limit permit eligibility criteria to US nationals and US citizens, with no other qualifying criteria. The Council took initial action on this amendment at its July 2010 meeting in Honolulu. The SSC in February 2011 concurred with the Council's preliminary recommendations. The Council is scheduled to take final action on this amendment on March 10.

As part of the Council meeting, a free Fishers Forum will be open to fishermen and the general public 6 to 9 p.m. March 8, at the Governor Lee Auditorium. The Council will also hold a symposium for high school and community college students 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Lee Auditorium. The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council was established by Congress to manage fisheries in offshore waters around Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and the US Pacific remote island areas. For more information or the agendas, visit www.wpcouncil.org or email info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov; phone (808) 522-8220, or fax (808) 522-8226.

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) (Vice Chair); William Sword, recreational fisherman (American Samoa); Manuel Duenas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam) (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; Mariquita Taitague, Guam Department of Agriculture; William Aila, 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 Charles Ray, U.S. Coast Guard 14th District; and Bill Gibbons-Fly, U.S. Department of State.