



**WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL**

105th Council Meeting Highlights

The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, meeting at Midway Atoll July 10 and 11, approved an increase from 1,000 kilograms to 5,000 kilograms per year of precious coral from beds in the Hawaiian Archipelago that are currently unknown. The gold, pink, red and other precious corals are used to make jewelry

In approving the quota increase, the Council recognized that the initial quota was set when the harvest method used was dragging the ocean bottom with large tangle nets. As a result, up to 80 percent of the harvest was either lost or destroyed. The present method uses deepwater, manned submersibles, is 100 percent selective and targets only mature colonies. The Council also recognized the amendment would give harvesters an economic incentive to explore for currently unknown beds. Only seven beds are known to exist in the Hawaiian archipelago. More than 99 percent of precious coral habitat has not been surveyed. Knowing the location and size of additional beds would help the Council better manage the fishery.

The quota increase is accompanied with several precautionary regulations:

- A maximum of 1,000 kg harvest is allowed at any given site;
- A maximum of 1,000 kg can be gold coral;
- No gold coral can be taken from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands;
- No more than 50 percent of the total legal stock of gold or pink coral at any given site within the exploratory bed may be harvested;
- No harvesting is allowed in the exploratory area within one bed diameter of an established, conditional, or refugia bed; and
- Observer, video or remote monitoring coverage may be required at the direction of the National Marine Fisheries Service, in consultation with the Council.

Also at the Midway meeting, the Council supported The Nature Conservancy's efforts to purchase Palmyra Atoll, the establishment of an Omnibus deepwater research program to improve management of the deepwater benthic resources in the Western Pacific Region and the establishment of a research station at Midway Atoll. Council Member Judith Guthertz praised the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the ecotourism contractor, Midway Phoenix Corp., for "successfully establishing a wildlife refuge in balance with a limited ecotourism operation which includes recreational fishing." Guthertz also thanked the US FWS for "providing members firsthand experiences with the natural resources and atoll environment that is often at the center of Council discussions."

In a lengthy discussion about federal co-management of overlapping agency jurisdiction, the Council urged that the Secretaries of Commerce and Interior include the island governors of US Flag Pacific Islands and the Council in any decision relating to the jurisdiction of the Council and local authorities that manage living marine resources in the Western Pacific Region.