



**WESTERN  
PACIFIC  
REGIONAL  
FISHERY  
MANAGEMENT  
COUNCIL**

## **106<sup>th</sup> Council Meeting Highlights**

At an emergency meeting July 13 in Honolulu, the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council addressed the court order issued June 23 (amended June 26) by Judge David Ezra of the US district court in Honolulu that could have virtually closed Hawaii's longline fishery. Restrictions imposed by the order were to take effect August 26 and included the following for Hawaii longline vessels only:

- Total closure of fishing grounds north of 30 degrees North
- Two-month closure of fishing grounds south of 30 degrees North
- A limit of 636 sets per year, i.e., about 5 percent of the fishery's traditional effort
- 100 percent observer coverage, i.e., coverage nearly 20 times greater than most other US fisheries

If the remaining sets of the 636 annual limit were to be equally distributed among Hawaii's 115 longline vessels, each vessel would have been allowed to engage in less than one fishing trip for the rest of the year. However, no criteria had been established for allocating the remaining sets. Hence, a derby situation would probably have taken place, with Hawaii longline fishermen racing out in late August to harvest their last catch of tuna and swordfish for the year.

Following presentations by National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and public comments from longline fishermen, the Council passed a resolution that called for the following:

- Expedited completion of an up-to-date environmental impact statement for the fishery by NMFS;
- No set limits for the Hawaii longline fishery;
- 5 to 20 percent observer coverage of the fishery, which NMFS deems statistically sufficient to monitor fishery interactions with sea turtles;
- International agreements to protect turtles during all life stages; and
- International plan of action for sea turtles.

"Research organizations should develop positive steps that can be taken to conserve marine resources," the resolution noted. "This approach would avoid litigation, which results in management by the courts and which has no positive impact on the species themselves."

According to scientific evidence, the Hawaii longline fishery is not endangering Pacific sea turtle populations including endangered leatherback turtles, the Council contends. The Hawaii longline fleet accounts for about 3 percent of the fishing effort in the central and western Pacific and less than a dozen leatherback turtle mortalities per year, according to NMFS.