

Managing Marine Fisheries of Hawaii and the U.S. Pacific Islands – Past, Present, and Future ¹

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In 1976 the United States Congress passed the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act, which established eight quasi-federal regional councils to manage fisheries in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) surrounding the United States. Under this Act, subsequently reauthorized as the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Western Pacific Council or Council) is the policy-making organization for the management of fisheries in the EEZ adjacent to the Territory of American Samoa, Territory of Guam, State of Hawaii, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and the US Pacific island possessions of Jarvis, Johnston, Wake, Howland and Baker Islands, Kingman Reef and Palmyra and Midway Atolls (Figure 1). This area of 1.5 million nm² is the largest management area of the US regional fishery management councils and comprises about half of the total EEZ waters under US jurisdiction. This tremendous area is spread across the Pacific dateline and the equator.

The main task of the Council is to protect fishery resources while maintaining opportunities for domestic fishing at sustainable levels of effort and yield. The Council monitors fisheries within its region and prepares and modifies fishery management plans. It develops policies and management plans following the management principles and scientific requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, with consideration of the social, cultural and economic values and realities of its island communities. The Council strongly encourages cooperative fishery management among the islands and distant-water fishing nations throughout the Pacific region.

The fisheries under the Council's jurisdiction range from small-scale artisanal fisheries within the US waters to large-scale industrial fisheries in international waters. The fish caught in these fisheries are marketed worldwide as high quality fresh fish and as canned, dried and frozen products. Within the region there is a particularly high demand for high quality fresh fish as well as a demand for a wide range of fishery products by a culturally diverse population.

The Council plays an integral role in multilateral management of highly migratory Pacific stocks. It works with the other nations and territories in the Western Pacific through participation in the South Pacific Conference and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Convention. It also provides assistance to US territories negotiating Pacific Insular Area Fishery Agreements to permit foreign fleets regulated access to EEZ waters. Future management of pelagic fisheries will require the Council to maintain a high degree of participation at the international level.

Through exemplary collaborative studies with environmental organizations and industry, the Council has made significant strides towards identifying effective and practicable methods to minimize the incidental take of seabirds in longline fisheries. Plans are now being developed, again employing this collaborative approach, to find similarly effective and practical methods to minimize the incidental take of sea turtles in longline fisheries. The Hawaii pelagic longline fleet comprises roughly 3% of the total pelagic longline vessels operating in the western and central Pacific Ocean region and roughly 5% of the total effort in terms of number of hooks set per year in this area. To ensure the sustainability of longline fisheries, the Council must focus on identifying the best sea turtle and seabird mitigation methods and mainstreaming their use by both domestic and international fleets. The Council will also focus on incorporating principles of ecosystem-based management into all of its existing Fishery Management Plans (FMPs), continuing its efforts to provide indigenous communities access to marine resources and conducting stock assessments to implement new biomass-based overfishing control rules.

1. Presented at the conference, *Managing Our Nation's Marine Fisheries – Past, Present, and Future*, Omni-Shoreham Hotel and Conference Center, Washington, D.C., 13-15 November 2003.

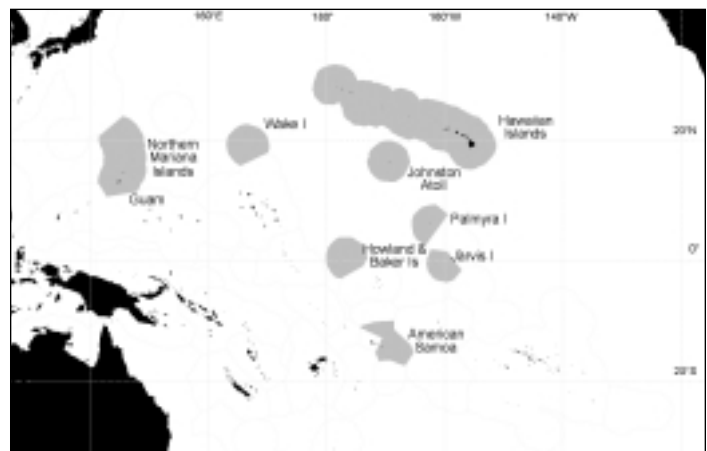


Figure 1.
EEZ waters managed by the Western Pacific Council.