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COUNCIL

## **Council to Consider Adjustment of Precious Coral Quota for the Exploratory Area of the Hawaiian Islands**

The domestic, commercial, deep-water precious coral fishery in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Western Pacific Region has been nearly dormant for 20 years. In 1999, researchers surveyed the resource around the main Hawaiian Islands, gathering information on new beds and the condition and recovery of previously harvested beds. Based on these findings, technological advances in harvesting capabilities and the renewal of the fishery, the Council in December 1999 adopted changes to the Precious Coral Fishery Management Plan (the measures are awaiting Secretary of Commerce approval), including the following, among others, in order to ensure conservation and management using a precautionary approach:

- prohibit the use of non-selective gear;
- increase minimum size of black coral to 1-inch diameter or 48-inch height;
- apply the 10-inch height size limit for pink coral to all areas; and
- require additional data on the Daily Precious Coral Harvest Log.

Management objectives for this fishery include encouraging the discovery and exploration of new precious coral beds; encouraging the development of new information concerning the distribution, abundance and ecology of precious corals; and allowing a fishery that achieves optimum yield on a continuing basis.

The seven known precious coral beds in Hawaii are identified as established, conditional and refugia. They account for 0.03 percent of the viable habitat for precious corals in the EEZ surrounding the archipelago. The remaining 99.97 percent of the viable habitat (1,200–2,000 feet) is identified as the Exploratory Area. It includes all locations where precious corals are believed to exist but have not been investigated. While industry could supply information on the Exploratory Area, potential harvesters claim that the current 1,000 kg per year quota for the area is too low to justify the capital investment required for exploration.

Because enhanced exploration will promote the classification of new beds for better conservation and management, the Council is consider revising the Exploratory Area quota. Alternatives include 1) No increase in quota; 2) Increase quota to 5,000 kg per year with no more than 1,000 kg of gold coral, minimum size requirements for gold and pink coral, and maximum harvest quota from any one bank; 3) Increase quota to 10,000 kg per year with no more than 1,000 kg of gold coral, minimum size requirements for gold and pink coral, and maximum harvest quota from any one bank.

A public hearing on the proposed measure will be conducted 10:30 a.m. July 6, 2000, at the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council office, 1164 Bishop St., Suite 1400, Honolulu, HI 96813. Written comments will be accepted until July 8. Please send comments to Kitty M. Simonds, executive director, at the above address or fax them to (808) 522-8226. The Council may take action on the proposed measure at the 105<sup>th</sup> Council Meeting on Midway Atoll, July 10 and 11, 2000. For more information, please call the Council at (808) 522-8220.