



**WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL**

PRESS RELEASE

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Council Finalizes Measures to Manage Sharks; Agrees to Measures Protecting NWHI Fisheries, Coral Reefs, Indigenous Fishing Rights

HONOLULU (March 2, 2000)—The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council today concluded a four-day meeting at the Ala Moana Hotel on fishery management issues for the exclusive economic zone (generally 3 to 200 miles from shore) surrounding Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and US Pacific Island remote areas, i.e., Kingman Reef, Midway and Palmyra Atolls, and Johnston, Wake, Jarvis, Howland and Baker Islands. Among actions taken by the Council were the following:

Shark Management

- Agreed to amend the Pelagics Fishery Management Plan (FMP) so as to (1) limit the harvest of non-blue sharks by the Hawaii longline fishery to one shark per trip to be landed dressed or whole and (2) set a precautionary harvest guideline of 50,000 blue sharks annually for the fleet.
- Encouraged the Coral Reef Ecosystem Plan Team to investigate the appropriate management measures of coastal shark stocks to fishing mortality.
- Recommended the Secretary of Commerce be notified of the non-transparency involved in developing the National Plan of Action for sharks, as well as those for seabird/fishery interactions and fishing capacity. The Council argued that the draft plans should be made available for review by the Council and its Scientific and Statistical Committee before being released for public comment and the Secretary should ensure that a representative from each of the nation's eight Regional Fishery Management Councils is involved in the development of the NPOAs that impact Council jurisdictions.

Northwestern Hawaiian Island Fisheries

- Defended the scientifically based fisheries management process and continuation of the lobster and bottomfish fisheries. A lawsuit against the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) alleges these fisheries are a threat to the Hawaiian monk seal and should be closed.

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- Recommended the year 2000 NWHI lobster harvest guideline not exceed 130,000; requested the lobster fishing industry enter into an agreement with NMFS to fish according to a research protocol; directed Council staff to draft an FMP amendment to replace the NWHI lobster assessment model with a more fully integrated model; and requested NMFS provide a comprehensive research plan that provides details on a lobster tagging study for both spiny and slipper lobster at all NWHI fishing banks.

Draft Coral Reef Ecosystem FMP Preferred Alternatives

- Expanded no-take marine protected areas (MPAs) in federal waters of the NWHI to include not only all substrate to a depth of 10 fathoms but also all substrate to 50 fathoms around Laysan, Midway (catch-and-release permitted) and French Frigate Shoals (one permitted bottomfish vessel to be grandfathered in).
- Added an anchoring ban in no-take MPAs in areas of particular concern (to be identified).
- Established additional measures to be possibly incorporated in the future under a framework process: (1) mooring buoys for anchoring; (2) mandatory insurance to cover the cost of vessel removal (and possibly mitigation) in the event of a grounding; and (3) a mandatory vessel monitoring system (VMS) for enforcement purposes.
- Regarding the national Coral Reef Task Force, the Council (1) agreed that management of reefs should remain at the local/regional level, consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act; (2) recommended the State of Hawaii and the US Fish and Wildlife Service adopt regulations consistent with those proposed by the Council to close 0 to 10 fathoms in the NWHI to all fishing; and (3) recommended that the Western Pacific Council be included under appropriate sections of the revised National Action Plan to Conserve Coral Reefs.

Fishery Rights of Indigenous People

- Recommended NMFS devote the appropriate funds to investigate turtle resources in the Northern Mariana Islands (NMI), Guam and American Samoa. A thorough assessment survey to cover a complete 12-month period was recommended before any conclusion on population assessment of the population of the green sea turtle in the Western Pacific Region is drawn.
- Recommended that workshops on the cultural use of sea turtles by indigenous people, similar to the one held in NMI November 1998, be duplicated in Hawaii, Guam and American Samoa.
- Recommended that one Council member seat be created for an indigenous person to represent native fishing concerns in the Western Pacific Region. The seat would rotate among the island areas of Guam, American Samoa, NMI and Hawaii.

For more information on these and other actions taken by the Council, please call 522-8220; fax 522-8226; or view the Council web page at www.wpcouncil.org.

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