



**WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL**

PRESS RELEASE

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US Pacific Islanders Are Unequal Americans, Fishery Representatives Say

"The people of the non-contiguous territories and states of the United States are tired of being overlooked and over-exploited," said Judith Guthertz, vice president and professor of public administration at the University of Guam and a member of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council.

Guthertz directed her remarks to members of the Council's Standing Committees on International and Pelagic Fisheries discussing a Congressional bill to ban shark finning. If passed as amended the bill would ban the possession of fins on fishing vessels, including foreign vessels, while in US waters. Many of the foreign vessels that resupply in Guam, American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands engage in the untargeted taking and finning of sharks.

"How will the US government make up for this when these vessels leave our ports?" Guthertz asked. "While the US continent is prospering, our economies are literally dying because of the continuing impact of the Asian economic crisis on island communities. We depend on Asia for our prosperity—not the US mainland. We have poor island economies at this time and earn sustenance where we can."

A National Marine Fisheries Service report estimates foreign fishing vessels transshipped between \$4 million to more than \$5 million of shark fins through Guam, American Samoa and Hawaii in 1998. A 1996 study estimates that foreign fishing vessels additionally inject up to about \$150 million into the economy of American Samoa and more than \$200 million into Guam through landings, processing, home porting, resupply and other operations. Developing Pacific Island neighbors with lower wages, lower taxes and less environmental regulations are potential competitors and threats to the US Pacific Island businesses, the study noted.

Council member Atiofele Sunia, an attorney representing American Samoa, said Congressmen are listening to environmental groups in Washington, DC. "They don't have as reliable and complete knowledge as we do about the region and the fragile fisheries they are attempting to affect," Sunia said.

"We don't have an equal voice in Congress," Guthertz said. "We have a terrific non-voting member of Congress, but we have to petition to voting members of Congress about the issues that are important to us. We are not being fairly represented as Americans." Like the Territories of Guam and American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands does not have a vote in Congress and its people are not allowed to vote for the US president.

The full Council is scheduled to meet tomorrow and Thursday to discuss fishery management issues in the federal waters (generally 3 to 200 miles from shore) around the US Pacific Islands, including Hawaii. The public meeting begins at 8:30 a.m. at the Maui Prince Hotel, Makena, Maui.