



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

MEDIA ADVISORY

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Managers of fisheries in federal waters of the US Pacific Islands to meet Nov. 28 to Dec. 1

The 16 members of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will meet Nov. 28 to Dec. 1 at the Ala Moana Hotel in Honolulu to discuss management plans for fisheries in federal waters (generally, 3 to 200 miles offshore) surrounding Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and US Pacific Island possessions. Among the topics of interest are the following:

Transition zone chlorophyll front A newly discovered oceanographic feature defines migration and forage habitat for marine resources in the North Pacific. The 5,000-mile long front is located at the boundary between low chlorophyll, subtropical waters and the high chlorophyll subarctic waters. In the winter this front is located at about 30°–35°N latitude, and in the summer at about 40°–45°N. Satellite and fisheries data show that loggerhead turtles and albacore tuna travel along this front as they migrate across the North Pacific.

Precious coral fishery: Status of precious coral beds in the main and Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI), based on research cruises conducted in September and November of this year. A review of the preliminary draft environmental impact statement (EIS) for the fishery.

Bottomfish fishery: Review of the preliminary draft EIS for the fishery. (Litigation in the federal district court in Honolulu seeks to close the fishery in the NWHI until the EIS is completed.) A public hearing on the eligibility criteria for new entries into the Mau Zone limited entry fishery, which encompasses waters around Necker and Nihoa Islands in the NWHI.

Lobster fishery: Review of the preliminary draft EIS for crustaceans. (On Nov. 15, Judge Samuel P. King of the federal district court in Honolulu closed the NWHI lobster fishery until an updated EIS is completed.) Status of research and stock assessment activities and plans as well as options for a five-year review of the management plan.

Recreational fisheries: Management and data collection initiatives, including resumption of the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey in Hawaii in 2001 after a 20-year hiatus.

Shark management: Presentation of a blue shark stock assessment, which indicates the North Pacific population is under-exploited and in no danger of annihilation or stock collapse. (The Council approved a quota of 50,000 blue sharks annually for the Hawaii longline fishery, to be adjusted based on the best available data. The measure is before the Secretary of Commerce for approval.)

Turtle management: Status of the draft EIS. (Judge David Ezra of the federal district court in Honolulu issued an order in August that virtually closes the Hawaii longline swordfish fishery until an updated EIS is completed. If the EIS is not completed by March 2001, the Hawaii longline tuna fishery will also be closed until May 2001.) The Council will also review updates on the Hawaii longline observer program and research to mitigate longline-turtle interactions. It will consider a recommendation by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to allow longline fishermen to assist scientific research in sea turtle biology by allowing them to tag and release sea turtles incidentally caught by the fishery, collect tissue samples and to return to port specimens killed inadvertently during operation.

Seabird management: An ongoing consultation between the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service seeks to alter longline fishery regulations in the process of being implemented because of concerns about the short-tail albatross.

Ecosystem and habitat: Status of the draft Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan; status of the President's initiative on coral reef management in the NWHI; results of recent reef surveys in the Line-Phoenix Islands and the NWHI; update on the President's initiative for marine protected areas; and overview of the Monk Seal Recovery Team and the Pacific Scientific Review Group. The Council will consider SSC concerns that a carbon-dioxide sequestration experiment scheduled to occur off the Big Island in mid-2001 could affect local fishing grounds.

Fishery Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Status of community development programs and community demonstration projects, to assist indigenous US Pacific Islanders participation in fisheries; status of initiative to establish a program to involve Native Hawaiians in a Hawaii observer program. The Council will consider the SSC recommendation that studies be undertaken on the recovery of the threatened green sea turtle populations in the US Pacific Islands and that a cultural take for green sea turtles be established if studies indicate an appropriate take level.

New appointments: The Council will select its advisory panel members for the 2001-2002 term. Ten applicants each will be selected to sit on the Council's four advisory sub-panels: recreational, commercial, indigenous/subsistence and ecosystem and habitat. The Council will also consider the SSC recommendation that a scientist with expertise in protected species be added to the SSC.