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COUNCIL**

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Plan to Manage US Pacific Island Coral Reefs Lauded**

Following the advice of fishermen, environmentalists, indigenous representatives, scientists and others, the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council today revised its preferred management measures for coral reef ecosystems in the US Pacific Islands. The revisions take into account the recent US Coral Reef Task Force recommendation for 20 percent no-take marine reserves as well as President Clinton's announcement in May for a cooperative, multi-agency effort to develop a plan within 90 days to ensure the permanent protection of the coral reefs in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI).

"The draft Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan (FMP) is a valuable source of information," noted Rod McInnis, regional administrator of the National Marine Fisheries Service Southwest Region and a Council member. "It will inform people and give them something to help them with the visioning sessions." Recommended by Hawaii Senator Daniel Inouye and endorsed by the president, the public sessions are to be part of the process used by the Departments of Commerce and Interior in developing the NWHI plan. The departments were also directed to work with the State of Hawaii and consult with the Council.

Tim Johns, director, Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources, and a Council member expressed some concern that endorsement of the Council plan may be viewed as supporting a unilateral management decision for the NWHI coral reefs. However, McInnis noted that, under the National Environmental Policy Act and environmental impact statement processes the Council follows in developing management plans, there would be ample opportunity for public input. Additionally, the required timeline would cause final action by the Council to occur after the president's 90-day deadline.

The Council plan identifies significant coral reef areas of special value as marine protected areas (MPAs), requiring special permits for fishing and other activities. Included in the MPAs are no-take zones, comprising approximately 14 percent of the NWHI, 67 percent of the Pacific remote island areas and 13 percent of the Western Pacific Region. If states and territories adopt consistent designations in waters 0 to 3 miles from shore, no-take zones would comprise 24 percent of the NWHI, 67 percent of the remote Pacific Island areas and 21 percent of the entire Western Pacific Region. All extractive activity, including bioprospecting, fishing and harvest for cultural/traditional purposes, would be prohibited in these zones but would be allowed by special permit in other parts of MPAs.

"The plan is addressing ecosystem issues by including all coral reef species and a network of MPAs that will serve as a backbone for ecosystem management in the region," noted Joshua Nowlis, representative for the Center for Marine Conservation. "I'm greatly encouraged."

"I believe the Council realizes the need to address the sensitivity of indigenous groups regarding MPAs and no-take zones," echoed Isaac Harp, kanaka maoli Hawaii. "I support absolute no-take zones, which are like an insurance policy in case other areas become depleted."