
PRESS RELEASE

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Council Seeks to Improve Management of Bottomfish, Crustacean and Precious Coral Resources

The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council is evaluating the need to amend its Bottomfish, Crustacean and Precious Corals Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) to better achieve the management objectives of these FMPs. Currently, no federal regulations are in place to manage these resources in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) surrounding the Northern Mariana Islands (NMI) and the Pacific remote island areas, such as Wake Island. The EEZ in these areas are waters from 0 to 200 miles offshore.

The amendments would consider alternatives to address data shortfalls and possible impacts from the fisheries targeting these resources. The Council is seeking public comment and input on a wide range of management alternatives including, but not limited to, the following:

- \$ prohibit the use of explosives, poisons, bottom-set gillnet, bottom trawl, tangle nets;
- \$ federal permit and data reporting requirements;
- \$ limited access;

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- \$ vessel monitoring systems;
 - \$ observer program;
 - \$ closed season;
 - \$ closed areas;
 - \$ gear restrictions;
 - \$ size limits; and
 - \$ catch quotas.

In addition, as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council is seeking public comments on its intent to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Precious Corals FMP. The scope of the EIS analysis will include all activities related to the conduct of the fisheries and their impact on protected species and other things. The EIS will also contain an analysis of the socioeconomic impacts of the fisheries on fishermen, processors, allied support industries, consumers, other users and benefactors of the resources, fishery managers and fishing communities.

The public scoping hearings on the Bottomfish, Crustaceans and Precious Corals FMP and on the EIS for the precious corals fisheries will be held 6:30–8:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 16, at the Joeten-Kiyu Public Library Conference Room. For more information and copies of the documents for the precious corals EIS, phone the NMI Division of Fish and Wildlife Resources at (670) 322-9834; call the Council at (808) 522-8220 or fax (808) 522-8226; or view the Council's Web site at www.wpcouncil.org.

Written testimony on the EIS for the precious corals fisheries will be accepted until March 15, 2000. Please address correspondences to Kitty M. Simonds, executive director,

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