



**WESTERN
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FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL**

PRESS RELEASE

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Council Acts to Close Lobster Fishery, Set Criteria for Bottomfish Fishery

(HONOLULU—30 November 2000) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council agreed yesterday to a recommendation by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to close the commercial lobster fishery in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) at the three primary banks (Necker, Maro and Gardner) through 2001 and at all other banks through 2002. Earlier this year, NMFS had closed the fishery for the 2000 season as a precautionary action to protect the resource due to increasing uncertainty about the size of the stock and an indication of recruitment decline at certain sites. NMFS said the stocks are not overfished, and the present and proposed closures aim to prevent the potential for overfishing.

“Many other factors could be responsible for a population decline, such as natural changes in overall oceanic productivity, changes in habitat or shifts in species competition,” reported Gerard DiNardo, NMFS biologist.

The Council will investigate fisheries disaster relief to reduce the economic and social hardships fishermen will face as a result of the recommended closure. The Council also approved a comprehensive review of the entire management regime for the lobster fishery, with a focus on the condition of the stock and ecosystem impacts, and recommended that NMFS replace its current lobster stock assessment model with one that can utilize more research information in its analyses.

In other action, the Council approved a weighted point system to determine the eligibility of a commercial bottomfish vessel to enter into the NWHI Mau Zone limited entry fishery should the number of vessels in the fishery fall below the 10-vessel limit. Applicants will receive one point for each year they landed at least 2,500 pounds of bottomfish in waters around the main Hawaiian Islands and two points for each year (up to a maximum of five years) for each year they made at least five trips to the NWHI and landed at least 500 lbs of bottomfish per trip. Additionally, one point will be awarded for each additional qualifying year that has been met in the NWHI.

The Mau Zone includes the waters surrounding Necker and Nihoa Islands. Mau Zone permits are non-transferrable and can be kept only by vessels making five trips each year and landing 500 lbs of bottomfish per trip. The use-it-or-lose-it clause keeps fishermen from sitting on their permits. In 2000, only nine vessels fished the Mau Zone, and it is possible that some of them will not reach the required number of trips and landings to retain their permits. Some bottomfish fishermen opted to pursue tuna in 2000, as the market prices for tuna were up.

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