



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Council to Finalize Coral Reef Ecosystem Plan

HONOLULU (7 March 2001)—The first US ecosystem-based fishery management plan (FMP) is one step closer to becoming reality. Members of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will meet noon to 6 p.m. March 13 at the Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu, to take final action on its Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for the Western Pacific Region. Persons in American Samoa, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands (NMI) may participate by teleconference. A public hearing is scheduled for 2 p.m. Hawaii standard time.

The FMP covers federal waters of the exclusive economic zone, or EEZ (generally, waters 3 to 200 miles from shore), surrounding the US Pacific islands. Coral reefs in these waters are mostly in remote areas—such as the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI), Guam southern banks, the Northern Islands of the Mariana archipelago and the US Pacific island possessions, such as Midway, Palmyra and Johnston Atolls. While these coral reef ecosystems are minimally exploited to date, there has been interest expressed for fisheries to expand in these areas.

The proposed management measures would designate marine protected areas, including no-take marine reserves and areas zoned for specific fishing activities allowed only with a special permit; establish fishing permit and reporting requirements for fishing for coral reef resources in the EEZ; specify the use of selective, non-destructive gears and harvesting methods; and establish a framework measure to allow for future regulations. Additionally, a formal procedure would be established to assess and control ecosystem effects of the bottomfish, crustacean and precious coral fisheries in federal waters operating under already established FMPs.

Prior to final discussion and action, the Council will review comments and recommendations from its Coral Reef Ecosystem Plan Team and Ecosystem and Habitat Advisory Panel as well as from the public during the hearing. The final FMP will be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and is expected to be implemented by year's end.

During the meeting, the Council will also review the biological opinion on the Hawaii longline fishery and its reasonable and prudent measures to reduce interactions with marine turtles; confirm the preferred alternative for the DEIS on the crustaceans fisheries in the Western Pacific Region; consider a long-term closure for the NWHI lobster fishery; and review the draft *Federal Register* notice for the Western Pacific Demonstration Project Program, which aims to foster and promote the involvement of eligible communities in US Pacific island fisheries.

For more information, please contact the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, 1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400, Honolulu, HI 96813; ph. (808) 522-8220; fax (808) 522-8226; www.wpcouncil.org; Guam Economic Development Authority (671) 475-0321; NMI Division of Fish & Wildlife Resources (670) 664-6000; or American Samoa Dept. of Marine & Wildlife Resources 011 (684) 633-4456.