



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Press Release

For Immediate Release

Contact: Sylvia Spalding 479-6563 or 955-4811 (Plumeria Rm)

Feds Asked to Provide Science Behind Proposed Fishery Closure

HONOLULU (Feb. 14, 2001)—In one month, Hawaii's 120 longliners may be hauling in their last tuna sets for two months and their last swordfish sets forever. Meanwhile, approximately 1,600 foreign longliners will continue to fish in the very location Hawaii fishermen may be forced to vacate. With tuna longliners landing \$180,000 a day, seven days a week, and Hawaii swordfish fishers landing \$16 million to \$28 million per year, the potential loss to the State of Hawaii is significant. The potential impact on residents is also substantial.

The longline fishery provides 80 to 90 percent of the fresh seafood in Hawaii, said Glenn Tanoue, president of Tropic Fish and Vegetable, which has been in operation for 50 years and has 80 employees. "To close it is an injustice to the people of Hawaii and arrogance on the part of the US government," he added.

About 200 members of the seafood industry appeared en masse at the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council today at the Ala Moana Hotel to protest the proposed closures. According to an August 2000 court order, the longline fishery is to be closed on March 15, 2001, unless a comprehensive environmental impact statement (EIS) on the fishery is completed. In December 2000, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) released the draft EIS, which recommends closing the Hawaii longline swordfish fishery permanently and the longline tuna fishery from April 1 to May 31 each year in order to reduce the incidental take of turtles. The final EIS is expected to be released in late February or early March.

Tony Costa, a fishery-support employee and ex-fisherman, said the draft EIS preferred alternative is full of irony. While the permanent closure of the Hawaii swordfish fishery and two-month closure of the Hawaii longline fishery is supposed to protect sea turtles, it actually will do the opposite. According to the draft EIS, itself, Costa said, anticipated outcomes of the closures are relocation of 45 swordfish vessels to areas where turtle takes are higher than Hawaii and increased imports of fresh tuna and swordfish from foreign fisheries where incidental turtle takes are higher than in the Hawaii longline fishery.

"Swordfish longline fishing off Uruguay catches 10 times more sea turtles than in Hawaii," Costa noted, referring to information in the draft EIS. "Swordfish longline fishing off Brazil catches up to 100 times more sea turtles than in Hawaii. Uruguay and Brazil are among the leading suppliers of fresh swordfish imported by the US."

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Hawaii longline fisherman Jim Cook said the scientists at NMFS Honolulu Laboratory should be asked to provide the science behind the preferred alternative.

“When you are dealing with the economic devastation of thousands [of people] you must find the truth,” Cook said. “The regulatory regime driven by environmental hysteria and voodoo science must be stopped.” He asked NMFS Southwest Regional Administrator Rebecca Lent to have the NMFS Honolulu Laboratory researchers who have been involved in turtle research to appear before the Council tomorrow to answer questions that are key to deliberations on the issue.

The Council’s four-day meeting in Honolulu began Feb. 12 and will end tomorrow. The Council manages federal waters (generally 3 to 200 miles offshore) around Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands and the US Pacific island possessions. It meets about three times a year. Its recommendations are submitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval.

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**Public Testimony
by Jim Cook, co-owner, Pacific Ocean Producers**

**before the
Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council
2 p.m., Feb. 14, 2001, at the Ala Moana Hotel**

Madam Chair, Council members:

The draft EIS and forthcoming Biological Opinion on sea turtles present you with serious and complex questions that need to be answered for you to make sound decisions regarding the future of pelagic longlining in Hawaii.

For several years now the National Marine Fisheries Service has been embroiled in dozens of lawsuits involving protected resources. A critical effect has been the loss of communication between the Honolulu Lab and this Council. Rock solid, world-class scientists are muzzled by a NMFS hierarchy with a bomb shelter mentality and a startling inability to address the future of our fisheries.

This is a national disease that we as Pacific Islanders must not succumb to. Our futures are inextricably linked to the sea and your job is to guide and protect that future. Therefore, I am asking you to delay decision-making on this issue until you have had the chance to ask and have answered questions that are key to your deliberations.

I am not talking about next month. I am talking about tomorrow. Ask the regional administrator to appear here with Honolulu Lab personnel involved in all aspects of turtle research and have them answer your questions. The Lab has an annual operating budget of \$9 million. Recently \$6 million in research monies targeting swordfish was awarded to it. In the coming years, a new \$45 million lab will be constructed which many of us lobbied for. All this to answer questions---are you going to accept the silence?

Pierre Kleiber is a qualified expert on modeling and statistics. Ask him to explain his confidence in the model NMFS is using to determine the future of 2000 people in Hawaii's seafood business.

Jerry Wetherell is the chief of stock assessment investigation for the Honolulu Lab. Ask him what effect mortalities caused by the Hawaii longline fishery have on the long term survivability of the species.

Chris Boggs is the chief of fish biology and ecology investigation. Ask him about the cooperation in research he receives from Hawaii fishermen. Ask him if time/area closures are an exportable solution to the turtle problem.

George Balaz is a turtle physiologist whose dedication and experience is legendary. Ask him about the ability of turtles to survive longline interactions.

Sam Pooley has worked closely with industry documenting economics. Ask him to tell you his opinion of the economic analysis in the draft EIS.

You cannot allow the dumbing down of science. You cannot allow the hiding behind lawyers. When you are dealing with the economic devastation of thousands you must find the truth.

On the evening of March 14th, Hawaii's 120 longliners will haul their last set and leave the grounds. Approximately 1600 foreign longliners that do not report their catch, do not carry observers, do not have Vessel Monitoring Systems, do not attend protected species workshops and will not be platforms for tagging and mitigation experiments will continue to fish in our area.

The leatherback turtle will swim towards extinction and the Center for Marine Conservation, Turtle Island Restoration Network, Earthjustice and the Office of Protected Resources can turn their attention to fixing another problem.

Do not expect the fishermen of Hawaii to go silently. We will hold this Agency's feet to the fire. We believe they are morally bankrupt and we intend to expose them.

We will watch carefully what actions the Agency takes on the east coast where they have been sued by Bluewater Fishermen's Association for violating fishermen's equal protection rights. They are engaging in a settlement conference in early March. This issue resonates clearly in Hawaii where the Agency has been derelict in its duty to protect the green sea turtle.

We have filed under the Freedom of Information Act to obtain information used in producing the draft EIS and its alternative. We will share this information with the Council.

We will work closely with the fishermen of California and Washington whose attorneys will file suit next week against their biological opinion.

We do not know what the new administration in Washington will do about fisheries, but we will lobby with all our hearts to clean house at NMFS to the lowest level possible. The regulatory regime driven by environmental hysteria and voodoo science must be stopped – we ask only for your help.

I have to tell you when I wrote this last night, I was not very happy – perhaps it shows. It strikes me that so much of this could be avoided if the Agency would include industry and the Council in the Biological Opinion process. Perhaps Judson should look at case law on this issue and see what Judge Ezra may think.