



## Press Release

For Immediate Release

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# Federal Fishery Council to Address Moratorium for American Samoa Longline Fishery, Refuge for Precious Corals

The **Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council** will meet **October 23 to 26, 2001**, at the **Hawaii Convention Center** in Honolulu to discuss fishery management in federal waters (generally, 3 to 200 miles offshore) surrounding Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and U.S. Pacific Island possessions. Among the key items to be discussed are the following:

**Moratorium for the American Samoa Longline Fishery:** There are potential problems for the local longline fisheries and community and culture of American Samoa resulting from overexpansion in the number of large longline vessels. The fishing effort has increased from about one million hooks per year at the end of 2000 to 8.8 million hooks per year today. The sharp increase in the number of vessels will increase the supply of fish in the short term, but may disrupt the long term benefits from the fishery. Consistent availability of fresh fish through the small boat fleet is essential to maintain the cultural and ceremonial obligations of Fa'a Samoa (Samoan culture). The American Samoan fishermen met in September 2001, and recommended that the Council limit the number of U.S. longline vessels permitted to fish in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone around American Samoa. The Council will consider implementing a moratorium, which would stop any new vessels from entering the fishery, until a limited entry program can be put in place.

**Deepwater Precious Corals:** Public comments will be solicited on a management

measure to establish an extensive refuge for deep-water precious corals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI). The refuge would run approximately 259 miles from the existing Wespac Refuge to the southeastern edge of Brooks Bank to a depth of 750 fathoms (i.e., 4,500 feet). Within it, the harvest of pink, red and gold coral would be banned. Additionally, harvesting gold coral would be banned throughout the entire NWHI and harvesting pink and red coral would be limited to 5 percent of the stock. The deepwater corals are used to produce fine jewelry and have a potential annual economic value to the state and Hawaii of about \$25 million.

**Sea Turtle Conservation and Management:** Dr. Peter Dutton, marine sea turtle expert with the National Marine Fisheries Service Southwest Region, will discuss the status of projects to recover Pacific turtle populations. The Council will also review the progress of fishing experiments in Hawaiian waters designed to reduce longline bycatch of sea turtles.

**Western Pacific Community Development and Community Demonstration Project Program:** As a result of concerns that communities of indigenous island residents under the jurisdiction of the Council were not benefitting from commercial fisheries, the Council developed a program aimed to promote involvement in fisheries, fisheries management or conservation. The program was developed for community residents who are descended from the aboriginal people to provide economic opportunities in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone. The announcement of the program and request for proposals is scheduled for December 2001.

The Council will also consider the recommendations from its Scientific and Statistical Committee, plan teams and advisory panel. **The Commercial, Recreational, Indigenous/- Subsistence and Ecosystem and Habitat Advisory Sub-panels will meet October 22 and 23, 2001, at the Hawaii Convention Center.** For more information, contact the Council at 522-8220; e-mail [nmfs.wprfmc@noaa.gov](mailto:nmfs.wprfmc@noaa.gov); or log on to [www.wpcouncil.org](http://www.wpcouncil.org).