



**WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL**

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Federal Fishery Council Votes to Approve American Samoa Longline Moratorium

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council today in Honolulu voted to recommend that the National Marine Fisheries Service implement emergency regulations to stop new entry of U.S. longline vessels over 50 feet in length from fishing in American Samoa. Longline vessels which do not hold a longline permit and have not documented a catch prior to October 25, 2001, will not be able to fish in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) around American Samoa. This moratorium would remain in effect until a limited entry program is implemented.

Henry Sesepasara, fisherman and advisor on American Samoan culture, emphasized the need for this action due to concerns about potential problems for the existing local longline fisheries, community and culture of American Samoa. Sesepasara noted that the American Samoa community eats a diverse range of seafoods, and Samoan culture is critically dependant on a constant supply of fish. This demand has been met through the small boat fleet, but is now threatened by the rapid expansion of the large longline vessel fleet. The fishing effort increased from less than 500,000 hooks set during the first quarter of 2001, to over 1,700,000 hooks set during the third quarter. As the American Samoan EEZ is relatively small and surrounded on all sides by foreign EEZs, this expansion could deplete the local availability of tuna stocks.

Fish too Fresh for Hilo Fish Auction

Fishermen in Hilo are suffering from the closure of the Suisan Co. Fish Auction, according to Jim Cook of Pacific Ocean Producers. After 95 years in business, the fish auction closed due to federal regulations imposed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Part of the reason for the closure was due to Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) protocols, food safety regulations which, among other requirements, stipulate the temperature of the fish to be 32° F or below when sold. Large fish caught the previous evening off the Hilo coast could not cool quickly enough to be sold at this temperature by the following morning. Essentially, the fish was too fresh to be sold. Now, the fishermen are forced to sell their catch for much lower prices, adding to economic hardships felt by the Hilo community.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Approves Use of Traditional Longline Basket Gear

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has approved a request to allow traditional basket-style longline gear to be used when longline fishing north of 23° N. without the restrictions required under the November 2000 Biological Opinion to reduce fishery interactions with the endangered short-tailed albatross. This "old-style" gear consists of tarred rope which has a sink rate comparable to monofilament longline gear set with a line-setting machine, which significantly reduces the risk of incidentally catching seabirds. Logbook and observer data from the single vessel which uses this type of gear indicate that no albatross of any species have been caught during fishing operations. Monofilament gear must be deployed with a line-setting machine and weighted with at least 45 grams within one meter of each baited hook.

Marlin Management Plan

The Council also approved the development of a comprehensive management plan for Pacific marlin. The plan would develop options for management of marlin catches in both

recreational and commercial fisheries, as well as compiling all relevant information and data on marlins caught in the western Pacific region.

Hawaiian Monk Seal Research

The number of Hawaiian monk seals in the main Hawaiian islands have increased in the recent years, and the pups being born are considered healthy compared to pups at certain breeding sites in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The Council noted that these observations provided an excellent opportunity for a natural experiment to compare the Hawaiian monk seals in these two locations. They recommended that the National Marine Fisheries Service undertake research projects to identify factors contributing to the apparent differences in health in young Hawaiian monk seals.

For more information, contact the Council at 522-8220; e-mail nmfs.wprfmc@noaa.gov; or log on to www.wpcouncil.org.