



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Hawaii Longline Fleet Shuts Down at Midnight

HONOLULU (14 March 2001)—The 115 longline vessels operating out of Hawaii will be shut down at midnight tonight under a court order issued by US District Judge David Ezra. Under the order, the fleet would be docked until May 31 or until the judge lifts the closure following the completion of an updated environmental impact statement (EIS) for the fishery by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The judge ordered the EIS to be completed by April 1.

Yesterday, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council urged NMFS to petition Judge Ezra to lift the total closure of the fleet until the EIS is delivered. Other measures mandated by the judge, such as 20 to 100 percent observer coverage, limited swordfish fishing and area closures would remain in place.

Concurrent resolutions are being introduced into the Hawaii Legislature today by Senator Rod Tam and Representative Ezra Kanofo that also respectfully urge the judge to delay closing the fishery to avoid adverse economic impact.

The fleet lands \$180,000 of fish daily during the closed months. The 75-day court-order closure equates to \$13.5 million in lost revenue to the state in fishing landings only. Daily losses to fishing vessels, which have high overhead, is \$1,100 per day per vessel or \$82,500 per vessel during the 75-day closure. Fish wholesalers, retailers, shore-side support business, restaurants and others are also expected to be negatively impacted.

The Council yesterday urged NMFS to develop a compensation package as soon as possible to assist the fishing industry in Hawaii during the period when the fishery will be closed. It also asked NMFS to reconsider other proposed longline closures for the Hawaii and other US Pacific island fleets that are contained in the draft EIS and a draft biological opinion for the fishery. The Council recommended that, instead, an experimental fishery be implemented to test and demonstrate the utility of various sea turtle mitigation measures and international plans of action be developed to conserve marine resources, particularly threatened and endangered species.

According to the US Coast Guard 14th District, its C-130s and cutters will be employed to ensure that the 30 to 40 longline vessels currently at sea maintain the directive by NMFS to quit fishing at midnight and immediately return to port.