



WESTERN  
PACIFIC  
REGIONAL  
FISHERY  
MANAGEMENT  
COUNCIL

## Press Release

For Immediate Release

Contact: Paul Dalzell, 522-6042

---

# Moratorium Suggested for American Samoa Longline Fishery

Scientists from throughout the United States and the Pacific convened in Honolulu October 9 to 11, to discuss fishery management issues in the U.S. Pacific Islands. The potential problems for the local longline fisheries and community and culture of American Samoa resulting from possible overexpansion in the number of large longline vessels was among the key items discussed. 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 most common type of longline vessel in American Samoa is a 30 foot, open decked catamaran known as an *alia*. Last year, there were only three longline vessels larger than 50 feet in length operating in American Samoa. Today more than 22 large vessels are operating from Pago Pago, and more are expected to join this segment of the fleet in the near future. As a consequence of rapid expansion, the potential 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 15 scientists are members of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), which advises the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council. Alternatives were discussed to address the problems associated with rapid expansion, while not overly constraining the development of the fishery. The sharp increase in the number of vessels would increase the supply of fish in the short term, but may disrupt the long term benefits from the fishery, particularly if they compete for fish

with the small alia fleet. Fluctuations in ocean environmental conditions or prey availability also can cause changes in local abundance and catch rates of pelagic fish, resulting in downturns in fishery production which may be amplified by the increase in fishing effort.

The SSC heard recommendations from the American Samoa fishermen, which met in September 2001 to discuss management alternatives. These recommendations consisted primarily of limiting the number of U.S. vessels permitted to longline in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone around American Samoa. Until a limited entry program can be put in place, the American Samoa fishermen requested a moratorium, which would stop any new vessels from entering the fishery. The SSC recommended implementation of the moratorium.

The SSC also approved a framework adjustment for Precious Corals, which establishes an extensive reserve 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.

Recommendations from the SSC and other advisory bodies will be reviewed by the Council at its next meeting, October 24 to 26 at the Hawaii Convention Center. For more information, contact the Council at 522-8220 or log on to the Council website at [www.wpcouncil.org](http://www.wpcouncil.org).