



WESTERN
PACIFIC
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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Council's Pelagic Fisheries Standing Committee Opposes Federal Management Decisions

HONOLULU (Feb. 12, 2001)—The Pelagics Standing Committee of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council meeting today in Honolulu agreed that a suite of recent management decisions that would impact the Hawaii longline fishery should be reexamined.

- On Dec. 18, 2000, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) released a draft environmental impact statement (EIS) for the pelagic fisheries of the Western Pacific Region, which proposes eliminating the Hawaii swordfish fishery and closing the Hawaii-based longline tuna fishery two months each year. The committee disagrees with that option (with one abstention) and instead recommends that the Hawaii longline swordfish fishery be allowed to operate for a finite period (e.g., three years) as a demonstration fishery, to test the efficacy of measures to reduce longline-turtle interactions. Kitty Simonds, Council executive director, said other US fisheries where protected species interactions occurred were not closed down, but that solutions were tested and developed in those fisheries.
- On Jan. 4, 2001, the NMFS Office of Protected Species in Silver Spring, Md., suggested that a blanket 50 percent mortality rate be applied to all turtles incidentally caught by US longline fisheries. The Standing Committee members disagree with that suggestion and instead concurs with the Council's scientific advisory body that observer data should be used to produce statistically justifiable estimated mortality rates. This would provide an incentive for the fisheries to move from higher to lower interaction rates. NMFS Sustainable Fisheries and Honolulu Lab also disagree with the 50% across-the-board recommendation.
- On Jan. 22, 2001, NMFS issued the 2001 List of Fisheries, which proposes to reclassify the Hawaii longline fishery from its present Category III status to Category II under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. This change would signify that the fishery has "occasional interactions" with marine mammals in the Pacific instead of "a remote likelihood or no known incidental mortality and serious injury of marine mammals." The proposal is based on spurious mathematics instead of real science argued the Council's pelagics coordinator. "The fishery has had a small number of interactions with six species of 20 some species of cetaceans that are known to occur in the area of the Hawaii longline

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fishery," he said. "Moreover, the impact on pilot whales by the fishery suggested by NMFS is based on a limited nearshore stock assessment, while the two longline interactions with the species occurred on the high seas, for which there is no population assessment."

- On Nov. 28, 2000, the US Fish and Wildlife Service issued a biological opinion on the short-tailed albatross that requires a set of gear restrictions on longline vessels operating north of 23°N latitude. The Pelagics Standing Committee reviewed the recommendation by the Council's scientific advisory body that found the biological opinion to be "scientifically flawed." The Committee recommends that the Secretary of the Interior be asked to revisit the biological opinion.

Among other recommendations adopted by the Standing Committee is a revised control date for the Hawaii fishery at Cross Seamount, located about 150 miles southwest of Honolulu, and no quota for blue sharks taken by the Hawaii longline fishery. The Standing Committee recommendations will be taken up by the full Council on Wednesday, Feb. 14. At 2 p.m. that day there will be a Fishermen's Forum on Pelagic Issues, during which fishermen will provide comment on the impacts of these and other management measures.

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