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FISHERY  
MANAGEMENT  
COUNCIL

## Press Release

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Contact: Sylvia Spalding (808) 522-8220 or 479-6563 (cell)

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### **One-Size-Fits-All Fishery Management Criticized**

Individual fishermen and representatives from U.S. flag Pacific Islands today criticized federal fishery regulations that seem to disregard their unique situations.

Speaking before the Enforcement Standing Committee of the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council in Honolulu, Tom Webster explained that the old-style "basket" longline gear he uses to catch tuna will be negatively impacted by recent regulations implemented by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to reduce turtle actions by Hawaii longline vessels targeting swordfish. The gear Webster employs consists of tarred rope and seven hooks between buoys. Because the rope is heavy and sinks quickly, Webster explained, his fishing vessel has had no interactions with marine turtles. However, NMFS regulations now require that longline vessels based in the U.S. Pacific islands use a line shooter and 15 hooks between buoys, requirements aimed to quickly send lighter weight monofilament line to deep water and keep it there. The regulations do not apply to domestic vessels based in the U.S. mainland or foreign vessels fishing in the same international waters as the Hawaii fleet.

The Enforcement Standing Committee recommended that NMFS define and exclude basket longline gear from its recent regulations.

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Representatives from Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands also voiced disapproval of NMFS' plan to impose new longline regulations in their fisheries, noting that the restrictions are not based on data from their waters and will prevent their domestic fisheries from developing.

In a similar vein, in the Precious Coral Standing Committee Meeting, the Guam, Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoan representatives cautioned against the adoption throughout the region of restrictions that were developed for the Hawaii fishery, because they could impair the development of a precious coral fishery in their waters.

Among other Standing Committee recommendations passed today that will be addressed by the **full Council tomorrow through Thursday (June 19-21) at the Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu**, are the following:

**Enforcement:** 1) The federal government should inform foreign fleets about the recent Congressional ban on the landing of shark fins without the accompanying carcass in U.S. ports; and 2) A pilot program to investigate the use of video observer monitoring on bottomfish vessels in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) should be implemented.

**Ecosystem and Habitat:** The Council should take final action on the Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan, to protect coral reef resources in federal waters (generally, 3 to 200 miles offshore) surrounding the U.S. Pacific islands.

**Pelagic Fisheries:** The Council should 1) move forward with its planned Marine Turtle Conservation Assessment; 2) assess the effectiveness of the setting chute, which deploys longlines underwater, to mitigate against interactions with seabirds; and 3) move forward with

plans to host an International Fisheries Forum in Honolulu in 2002 to address seabird and turtle interaction issues.

**Bottomfish:** 1) The Council should consider removing minimum landing requirements in the NWHI fishery and allowing existing permit holders the flexibility to charter or lease their permits and/or vessels; and 2) The Council should urge the Secretary of Commerce take advantage of the long experience and expertise of the Council and its advisors in managing fisheries in the NWHI to ensure that fisheries in the NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve comply with national standards. A cooperative approach with the Council is the best opportunity to promote sustainable fisheries and prudent fisheries management policy.

**Crustaceans:** NMFS should clarify what it would take to allow the NWHI lobster fishery to resume. The fishery was closed last year by court action, following a lawsuit that raised concerns about the fishery's potential interaction with endangered Hawaiian monk seals, and by emergency action by NMFS, due to uncertainties in the population model used to assess the stock.

**Indigenous and Subsistence Fishing:** The Council should investigate the potential for a cultural take of turtles either through a permit/exemption under or amendment to the Endangered Species Act.

**Program Planning:** The Council should continue to advance the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management throughout the Western Pacific Region.

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