



Fishery Council Acts to Better Protect Birds, Turtle

HONOLULU (18. Dec. 2000)—The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council has passed a set of measures aimed to further conservation and management of seabirds and turtles caught incidentally by the Hawaii longline fleet.

- To enhance knowledge of the species, the Council will request that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) provide the appropriate fishermen with needed permits to enable transporting of protected seabird and turtle specimens to shore for research purposes.
- To provide for protection of the endangered short-tailed albatross, the Council staff will revise the Council's previously adopted seabird mitigation amendment by adding an alternative that implements the terms and conditions of the short-tailed biological opinion by the US FWS. Hawaii-based longline vessels fishing north of 23°N will have to thaw their bait and dye it blue and use discards of fish offal to distract birds while setting and hauling their longlines. Vessels making shallow sets to target swordfish will also be required to set their lines at night, while vessels targeting deep-swimming tunas must employ a line shooter and weighted branch lines. The revised amendment and analysis will be reviewed by the Council when it next meets, Feb. 12–15, 2001, in Honolulu.
- To further understanding of the species, the Council recommended that any short-tailed albatross taken alive by the Hawaii longline fishery be outfitted with satellite tags when released back into the wild. Further, the US FWS should outfit the short-tailed albatross at Midway Atoll with satellite tags.
- The Council accepted its Scientific and Statistical Committee recommendation that studies be undertaken to identify what is required to determine, achieve and maintain recovery of green sea turtle populations in the Hawaiian Islands, American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Among other action taken during the final two days of the Council's four-day meeting, Nov. 28 to Dec. 1 in Honolulu, were the following:

- The Council requested that NMFS develop stricter screening processes to identify the most suitable personnel to be placed on vessels as observers. Major concerns are the costs of ship downtime and the cost to the taxpayer of observer training. Judge David Ezra of the US District Court in Honolulu earlier this year ordered 30 to 100 percent of Hawaii longline vessels carry observers, depending on the area fished, until an up-to-date

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environmental impact statement for the fishery is completed. Subsequently, longline operations have been hampered by seasick observers requiring vessels to abort operations and return to port or to remain at sea with incapacitated observers who are unable to fulfill their duties.

- Requested that its staff place the issue of interaction between large pelagic fishing vessels and offshore handline vessels at the Cross Seamount on the Council's next meeting agenda. Interaction between the fisheries have increased following area and seasonal closures placed on the longline fishery by Judge Ezra earlier this year.
- Noted the importance of accounting for all fish catches in the event that quotas are generated by the international fishery commission for the Central and Western Pacific that Pacific nations this summer agreed to establish. Currently, recreational fishermen in Hawaii are not required by State or federal regulations to provide catch reports.
- Directed its staff to assist in the development of eligibility criteria for the Community Development Program to allow selection and issuance of the two bottomfish fishing permits for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Mau Zone (federal waters surrounding Necker and Nihoa Islands) reserved for Native Hawaiian fishermen.
- Directed its staff to assist in the development of a pilot Native Observer Program in each island area. The program would support the training and employment of indigenous people as observers on fishing vessels.
- Appointed members to serve on the Council's four advisory panels for 2001-2002. The appointees were selected from each island area and will serve on one of the following advisory panels: Commercial, Recreational, Subsistence, or Ecosystems and Habitat. The Council also selected James Cook as overall Chair to the advisory panels and Richard Shiroma as Vice-Chair.

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council is responsible for preparing, monitoring and amending fishery management plans for federal waters (generally, 3 to 200 miles offshore) surrounding the US Pacific Islands. For more information on the above actions or the outcomes of the first two days of the Council meeting, please contact the Council at (808) 522-8220 or view the Nov. 30 press release on the Council's Web site at www.wpcouncil.org.

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