



WESTERN  
PACIFIC  
REGIONAL  
FISHERY  
MANAGEMENT  
COUNCIL

# Press Release

For Immediate Release

Contact: Sylvia Spalding 522-6044 or 479-6563 (cell)

## US Fisheries Head to Unveil New Turtle-Take Reduction Rules for Hawaii Longline Vessels

HONOLULU (7 March 2001)—William Hogarth, acting assistant administrator for fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), will arrive in Honolulu from Washington, DC, to present Hawaii fishermen, fishery managers and the interested public with information on an updated biological opinion on the effect of the Hawaii longline fishery on threatened and endangered sea turtles. Required under the Endangered Species Act, the biological opinion includes “reasonable and prudent alternatives” to reduce interactions between the fishery and sea turtles. Hogarth will make his presentation at a meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council to be held at the Ala Moana Hotel from noon to 6 p.m. on March 13.

Two days later, about 115 federally permitted Hawaii longline vessels will be shut down while NMFS dovetails the biological opinion into an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the fishery. In August 2000, US District Judge David Ezra ordered the fishery to be shut down from March 15 through May 31 2001, unless the EIS is completed or until the Judge lifts the closure order.

Council members and Hawaii longline fishermen have expressed strong dismay at the way the turtle-longline issue has been handled.

- The Judge found that NMFS failed to maintain an updated, comprehensive EIS and, therefore, imposed fishing restrictions that negatively impact fishermen and their families.
- Coincidentally, NMFS determined in May 2000, that the number of turtles specified in the 1998 biological opinion had been exceeded forcing NMFS to reinitiate consultation. NMFS used a different approach to assess turtle populations and a new policy to determine whether the fishery jeopardizes the turtle population.
- Although the Council offered comments on the NMFS draft EIS, NMFS developed the new biological opinion and its reasonable and prudent alternatives internally, reasoning that a biological opinion is a scientific document.
- NMFS apparently will not complete the EIS in time to forestall closure of the fishery.

During the meeting, the Council will also take final action on its Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan and draft EIS; discuss the preferred alternative for the draft EIS on the crustaceans fisheries in the Western Pacific Region; consider a long-term closure for the NWHI lobster fishery; and review the draft *Federal Register* notice for the Western Pacific Demonstration Project Program, which aims to foster and promote the involvement of eligible communities in US Pacific island fisheries. Persons in American Samoa, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands may participate in the meeting by teleconference. For more information, please contact the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, 1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400, Honolulu, HI 96813; ph. (808) 522-8220; fax (808) 522-8226; [www.wpcouncil.org](http://www.wpcouncil.org).