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COUNCIL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### US Pacific Islanders Say Feds Should Do More to Protect Their Fisheries

The federal government could do more for fisheries in the State of Hawaii, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and the Territories of Guam and American Samoa, according to the 40-member Advisory Panel of the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council. The panel of recreational, commercial, indigenous and subsistence fishermen and other US Pacific islanders concerned about fisheries in federal waters (generally, 3 to 200 miles offshore) met in Honolulu June 15 and 16.

Their recommendations will be reviewed by the Council, when it convenes June 18 to 21 at the Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu. The 16-member Council is mandated by Congress to monitor fisheries in federal waters surrounding the US Pacific islands and to develop and amend, as necessary, management plans for them.

Members of the advisory panel said the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) should immediately complete the area closure for fishing vessels over 50 feet in length around American Samoa. The area closure has been under development for four years. They said the Council should also consider extending the closure from 0 to 50 nautical miles (nm) offshore to 0 to 100 nm as originally proposed.

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The advisory panel also urged the Council to immediately begin the process to implement a limited entry program for the American Samoan longline fishery. American Samoa fishermen said the recent arrival of nearly a dozen large fishing vessels has created an emergency situation that adversely impacts recreational as well as commercial fishermen.

Advisory members also voiced concern about NMFS applying management policies derived for the Hawaii longline industry to the fisheries in Guam and American Samoa. They said NMFS should clarify the extent of its ban on shallow-set longline gear due to concerns about turtle hookups by the Hawaii longline fishery. They questioned NMFS' determination of allowable turtle hookup levels for pelagic fisheries in federal waters surrounding Guam, CNMI and American Samoa. They said the Council must make NMFS aware of the problems caused by creating policies based on data gathered in distant areas and employing these policies for all areas under their jurisdiction. They said studies should be done in areas where the regulations will be applied.

Advisory members from Guam, CNMI and American Samoa noted that their domestic fisheries are yet to be developed and could benefit from needed research. They said the amount of foreign fish leakage into domestic markets has increased and its socioeconomic impacts on the domestic fisheries need to be assessed.

Members of the advisory panel encouraged the Council to develop a marine turtle conservation and management plan aimed at recovering sea turtle populations in order to allow for some cultural take of turtles.

Among other recommendations by the advisory panel members are the following:

- NMFS should approve the Marine Conservation Plans, which would allow island governments to use fees collected from foreign fishing agreements to develop domestic fisheries.
- The Council should take final action on the Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan to provide the needed protection for reefs in federal waters of the US Pacific Islands.
- The Bush administration should review the executive order establishing the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve. Management of fisheries in the NWHI should follow the processes established under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.
- The development of a limited entry program for the Hawaii offshore handline fishery by the Council should include adequate consultation with the recreational fishing sector to assess impacts and explore provisions for inclusion of new entrants to the fishery and a use it or lose it permit requirements.
- During the re-authorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, more realistic definitions of recreational and commercial fishermen should be developed, taking into consideration the unique socio-cultural nature of the US Flag Pacific Islands.
- The Council should implement an education and outreach program in the island areas.
- The Council should support action against the use of untethered fish aggregation devices (FADs) by US and foreign purse seine fisheries.
- Federal regulations should be translated into indigenous languages.