



Past and current Council chairs and original Council members (l to r) Edwin Ebisui, Frank Farm Jr., Jim Cook, Paul Stevenson, Peter Reid, Wadsworth Yee, Frank Goto, William Paty, Kitty Simonds (executive director), Frank McCoy, Judith Guthertz, Peter Fithian, Sean Martin, and Roy Morioka.

U.S. Pacific Islands Celebrate 30 Years of Fisheries Management

On March 12, 2007, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council's 30th anniversary was celebrated by a gathering in Honolulu of past and current Council members, staff, partners and supporters. The celebration coincided with the 200th anniversary of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. This Act established the Council in 1976 to manage the fisheries in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) around Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and several remote U.S. Pacific islands. The Council also manages pelagic fisheries of the U.S. Pacific islands when targeted outside of the U.S. EEZ.

The Council's accomplishments over the past 30 years were recognized in a plethora of congratulatory letters, messages, proclamations and resolutions from throughout the Pacific region and Washington, DC. Well wishers ranged from U.S. Senators on Capitol Hill to fishermen anchored in remote island waters under gale force winds. They noted the many accomplishments by the Council in sustainable fisheries, ecosystem-based management, international management of highly migratory species, protected species conservation, promotion of indigenous fishery rights and traditions, and public participation in the decision-making process.

The congratulatory letter from William T. Hogarth, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service, provided a broad overview of the past three decades, noting that the Council has accomplished the following:

- Balanced the need for conservation with the need to sustain economically healthy fisheries.
- Promoted local fishery development through some of the first limited entry programs, including bottomfish, crustaceans and longline pelagics.
- Continually evaluated and instituted effective management measures (such as requiring logbooks and observers).
- Pioneered the first vessel monitoring system to be implemented in the U.S. EEZ.
- Clearly demonstrated awareness of the needs and preferences of Pacific islands fishing communities and the benefits of incorporating community knowledge and history in the fishery management process, including formal structures to ensure such participation at the local level, by promoting changes to the Magnuson-Stevens Act in 1996 to ensure that Pacific island fishery resources are managed for the benefit of indigenous people of Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands.
- Exercised continued leadership in preventing and mitigating bycatch of fish

and non-fish species in U.S. Western Pacific fisheries, including undertaking projects to conserve and restore especially vulnerable species, such as sea turtles in their nesting habitat.

- Prohibited drift gillnet fishing, bottom trawling and other non-discriminatory and destructive fishing methods in 1986 throughout its jurisdiction of 1.5 million nautical square miles.
- Prohibited longlining within 50 nautical miles of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands to protect albatross and Hawaiian monk seals.
- Implemented management measures in 2004 to protect sea turtles and seabirds by requiring its swordfish fishery to use circle hooks (the first fishery in the Pacific to do so).
- Hosted numerous workshops and supported research with NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, environmental NGOs, and fishermen to understand and mitigate interactions between longline gear and seabirds, turtles and marine mammals, and establish Hawaii as a world center for longline bycatch research.
- Addressed the critical need for international collaboration for the effective conservation and management of highly migratory species, by serving as a leading force in the amendment of the Magnuson-Stevens Act to include tuna and in the development of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, with participatory roles for the Council and U.S. Territories under the legislation for that Convention.
- Further recognized the international nature of Pacific fisheries by hosting several international conferences regarding not only fisheries management, but seabirds and sea turtles, fishing gear interactions with seabirds and sea turtles, and marine debris.
- Recognized early the need to apply ecosystem conservation principles and perspectives in fisheries management.
- Developed in 2004 the coral-reef ecosystems fishery, the first fishery management plan using ecosystem-based principles.

From the nation's capitol, U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye commended the Council for "its ability to carefully balance seemingly competing interests," and U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka recognized that the Council "has demonstrated that our traditional ocean practices are not only cultural but also practical" and that "the sharing of this knowledge will better communities throughout the world."

Governors, Legislatures, local fishery managers, enforcement agencies and fishermen from throughout the U.S. Pacific echoed these thoughts. An American Samoa letter of appreciation said "The many milestones you have achieved have brought forth tremendous benefits for the indigenous islanders who actually depend on these marine resources for their daily sustenance. Your protective efforts over certain species of cultural significance will be long remembered by the island people."

Perhaps the most heartfelt messages came from the fishermen themselves. The Saipan Fishermen Association said "Despite our remoteness and isolation from our mainland policy makers, the Council has effectively ensured that our unique needs and challenges are adequately understood and addressed. ... It is through this Council that our faint voices have been amplified that enables us to be heard and recognized at the national and international arena."

The reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act provides the Council with even stronger mandates to assist the U.S. Pacific islanders by promoting the use of traditional knowledge and enhancing training and educational opportunities. For more information on the Council, go to www.wpcouncil.org.

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council

The Council is the policy-making organization for the management of fisheries in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ, generally 3-200 miles from shore) around the Territory of American Samoa, Territory of Guam, State of Hawaii, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and U.S. Pacific island possessions—an area of nearly 1.5 million square miles. The Council is tasked with maintaining opportunities for domestic fishing while preventing adverse impacts to stocks, habitat, protected species and ecosystem resources.



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Over the past 30 years, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council has been an integral part in the development and implementation of many local, national and international conferences, workshops, projects and organizations. Here are a few of their logos.



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As seen in Pacific Magazine's May-June 2007 Issue. • www.pacificmagazine.net

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