

Press Release

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WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Council Votes for Federal Non-Commercial Fishing Permit Exemption for Youth, Supports Territorial Fishery Development, Takes Steps to Set Annual Catch Limits

HONOLULU (01 July 2010) Youth who catch bottomfish in Hawaii's offshore waters recreationally or for subsistence may soon be able to pocket \$24 a year. The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council voted yesterday in Honolulu to exempt persons 16 years and younger from non-commercial federal fishing permit requirements. Currently, the only such permit is the annual federal main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) Non-Commercial Bottomfish Permit, which is required of all non-commercial fishermen, with the exception of charterboat customers, who target bottomfish in waters 3 to 200 miles offshore around the MHI. A non-refundable processing fee of \$24 is charged for each permit application.

The MHI Non-commercial Bottomfish Permit regulation first came into effect in August 2008. It is part of the suite of measures established to ensure the health and sustainable harvest of MHI bottomfish stocks. The permit includes reporting requirements that provide fishery scientists and managers with non-commercial fishing catch and effort information. Vessel operators in the fishery must report their bottomfish fishing activities to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Because non-commercial bottomfish data has been lacking, this sector of the fishery is managed federally through bag limits and by a seasonal closure that is triggered when the commercial sector reaches its annual total allowable catch (TAC) limit. The State of Hawaii, which has jurisdiction in waters 0 to 3 miles from shore, has a complementary seasonal closure and will consider complementary bag limits at the July 8, 2010, meeting of the Board of Land and Natural Resources. The State does not have a permit requirement but does have a set of Bottomfish Restricting Fishing Areas (BRFAs). When the MHI bottomfish fishery is under a seasonal closure, no fresh local bottomfish is available in Hawaii as the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) bottomfish fishery permanently closed in March 2010 due to the establishment of the NWHI Marine National Monument by Presidential proclamation.

Keeping US Pacific island fish on Hawaii tables was also on the minds of Council members as they agreed today to management measures that will allow the US Territories of Guam, American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to assign up to 750 mt of bigeye tuna a year each under a domestic chartering agreement. The draft measures would include appropriate oversight by NMFS.

National quotas for bigeye tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) are set by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), to which the United States is a party. Under current WCPFC measures, the United States longline fleet (which is based in Hawaii) is allowed 3,763 mt bigeye tuna and the US Territories have up to 2,000 mt of bigeye tuna longline landings each. However, the Territories are exempted from these limits if they are undertaking responsible fisheries development.

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Last year, the Hawaii longline fleet reached the WCPO bigeye limit on Dec. 29, 2009. Current forecasts suggest the Hawaii fleet may reach the 2010 quota at the beginning of December. The proposed domestic charter arrangements with federally permitted longline vessels in US Pacific Islands (also known as the Western Pacific Region) is viewed as a win-win, providing the US Territories with much needed fisheries development finance and ensuring Hawaii has quality bigeye tuna from environmentally responsible US sources during the holiday season. The demand for bigeye tuna in Hawaii has led to a six-fold increase in imports of this species over the past 10 years.

Among other key decisions made by the Council before the conclusion of the four-day meeting today are the following:

Annual Catch Limits: In 2011, the Council will be required to set annual catch limits (ACLs) for all federally managed species that have a lifespan of more than one year unless they are internationally managed or designated as an ecosystem component (i.e., included in the fishery management plan but not harvested in the fishery). The ACLs must be derived through a specific procedure defined by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and associated NMFS guidelines. Yesterday, the Council voted to continue to monitor and manage the nearly 800 species taken in Council managed fisheries rather than removing any of them from the management plans. The Council also began defining which species are exempted, which are “in the fishery” and which are under the “ecosystem component designation.” ACLs must be set for species that are “in the fishery” only. For the pelagic species and species group, the Council agreed that most tuna, blue and striped marlin, swordfish, bigeye thresher, shortfin mako, blue shark, mahimahi, ono, opah, monchong, escolar and oil fish are international exceptions. Pacific bluefin tuna, kawakawa, other tuna relatives, black marlin, shortbill spearfish, sailfish, pelagic thresher shark, common thresher shark, silky shark, oceanic white-tip and salmon shark are ecosystem components. Diamondback squid, neon flying squid and purple-back flying squid have life spans of less than one year. To set ACLs for species that are in the fishery, the Council voted to use a four-tier system as the best means for incorporating science into the decision process and dealing with different levels of data quality and stock assessment information.

Marianas Trench Marine National Monument (MNM): The Council recommended the following fishery management measures:

- Prohibit commercial fishing within the Islands Unit.
- Limit eligibility for non-commercial fishing permits to residents of the Guam and Northern Mariana Islands fishing communities (as that term is defined under Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act).
- Limit eligibility for recreational charter for-hire fishing permits to owners/operators of a charter business legally established in Guam or Northern Mariana Islands fishing communities.

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- Require that the vessel owner and operator fishing in the Islands Unit (and not all fishing participants on that vessel) have a non-commercial fishing permit and that the valid permit is carried on board the vessel.
- Do not require fishery participants conducting customary exchange to report monetary reimbursements or trip expenses due to anticipated behavioral modifications that would impact cultural practices related to the motivations of customary exchange.
- Allow family and friends of residents of Guam and Northern Mariana Islands fishing communities to be included in the customary exchange of fish harvested within the Islands Unit.
- Have all non-commercial permits be valid for one year after issuance.
- Require that the permitted operator of a vessel fishing in the Island Unit to fill out the logbook and that both the permitted owner and operator ensure that catch logbooks for all fishing conducted on the vessel is submitted within 30 days to NMFS and the CNMI Division of Lands and Natural Resources.

Rose Atoll MNM: The Council recommended the following fishery management measures:

- Prohibit commercial fishing.
- Limit eligibility for non-commercial fishing permits to residents of the American Samoa fishing community (as that term is defined under Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act).
- Limit eligibility for recreational charter for-hire fishing permits to owners/operators of a charter business legally established in the American Samoa fishing community.
- Require that the vessel owner and operator fishing in the Rose Atoll MNM (and not all fishing participants on that vessel) have a non-commercial fishing permit and that the valid permit is carried on board the vessel.
- Do not require fishery participants conducting customary exchange to report monetary reimbursements or trip expenses due to anticipated behavioral modifications that would impact cultural practices related to the motivations of customary exchange.
- Allow family and friends of residents of the American Samoa fishing community to be included in the customary exchange of fish harvested within the Rose Atoll MNM.
- Have all non-commercial permits be valid for one year after issuance.
- Require that the permitted operator of a vessel fishing in the Rose Atoll MNM to fill out the logbook and that both the permitted owner and operator ensure that catch logbooks for all fishing conducted on the vessel is submitted within 30 days to NMFS and the American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources.

Swordfish Limit for Hawaii Tuna Longline Vessels: The Council took final action to allow Hawaii longline vessels setting deep for tuna to retain 25 swordfish per trip when using circle hooks and 10 swordfish per trip when using other hooks. When carrying an observer, the vessels would have no swordfish retention limit, regardless of the type of hook used. North Pacific swordfish stocks are healthy, and this measure will allow fishermen to market rather than waste swordfish that are not alive when boated by longliners that set deep for tuna.

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NWHI World Heritage Site Designation: The Council reiterated its concern about the NWHI MNM nomination to become a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site. As detailed in its March 28, 2007, public comments on the nomination, the Council questions the transparency of the process to include public participation, the need to clearly provide the purpose and need or objective of the designation, and the role of the National Park Service administrative authorities and related jurisdictional issues. Council Member Manny Duenas recalled that, following the nomination, Jean-Michel Cousteau said the area was destined to attract 3 million tourists, while a Native Hawaiian fisherman lamented that his son would not be able to enjoy the fishing rights and legacy in the NWHI that the previous three generations of his family had. The UNESCO World Heritage Committee is scheduled to address the nomination at its July 25 to Aug. 3, 2010, meeting in Brazil.

The Council was established by Congress in 1976 to manage fisheries in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) waters surrounding the US Pacific Islands. Decisions made by the Council are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval. For more information and the agenda, contact the Council at (808) 522-8220, email info.wpcouncil.org or go to www.wpcouncil.org.

Council Members: Secretary of Commerce appointees nominated by Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa and CNMI governors: William Sword, recreational fisherman/civil engineer/manager (American Samoa); Stephen Haleck, business owner (hotel and gas station) (American Samoa) (Chair); Manuel Duenas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam) (Vice Chair); Frederick Duerr, resort and hotel consultant (Hawaii) (Vice Chair); Peter Young, environmental consultant (Hawaii); David Itano, researcher (Hawaii) (Vice Chair); Sean Martin, Pacific Ocean Producers (Hawaii); and Benigno Sablan, cultural practitioner (CNMI) (Vice Chair). Designated state officials: Ignacio Dela Cruz, CNMI Department of Land & Natural Resources; Joseph Torres, Guam Department of Agriculture; Laura Thielen, Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources; and Ray Tulafono, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources. Designated federal officials: Mike Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office; Jerry Leinecke, U.S. Fish and Wildlife; RAdm Stephen Mehling, District Commander, U.S. Coast Guard 14th District; and Bill Gibbons-Fly, U.S. Department of State.