



**WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL**

MEMORANDUM

TO: Interested Parties

October 10, 2012

FROM: Kitty M. Simonds

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kitty M. Simonds". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

SUBJECTS:

- 1. Recommendations on Moratorium for Gold Coral**
- 2. Annual Catch Limits for American Samoa, Guam and Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Bottomfish, Crustaceans and Precious Corals**
- 3. Annual Catch Limits for Hawaii Non-Deep 7 Bottomfish Crustaceans and Precious Corals**

The Council will consider the issues summarized below, including any public comments on these initiatives. The Council is expected to take action on them at its 155th Council Meeting to be held October 29-November 1, 2012 at the Laniakea YWCA-Fuller Hall, 1040 Richards Street, Honolulu. Written comments should be sent to the Council's Executive Director by 5:00 p.m. October 26, 2012 by mail, FAX or email as indicated below.

Mail: Executive Director

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1. Recommendations on Moratorium for Gold Coral

Past research on gold coral indicated that the linear growth rate of gold coral is approximately 6.6 centimeters per year, suggesting a relatively young age for large trees. These estimates were based on the assumption that growth rings are laid down annually as in other precious corals such as black coral and pink coral (*Corallium rubrum* and *C. secundum*). Recent research done on the aging of gold corals using radiometric dating on three samples collected from the Makapuu Bed and off of the island of Hawaii found that gold coral may grow at a much slower rate of 14-40 micrometers per year aging those samples at 450-2,740 years old. Research conducted on *Gerardia* species in the Atlantic have estimated the age of large gold coral trees to be 1,800 years old.

As a result of this discrepancy between growth estimates, the Council recommended placing a five-year moratorium on the harvest of gold corals in the Western Pacific region. The moratorium took effect September 12, 2008 and will expire on September 11, 2013. During the moratorium, researchers marked and measured 48 gold coral colonies at six different sites across the Hawaiian Archipelago and found no discernible growth. They estimated gold coral growth was slower than estimates produced through previous linear measurements. While this one study does provide additional information, studies looking at the gold coral growth over a period longer than 1-9 years may need to be done to confirm these results. Therefore, the need continues to provide time for the gold coral estimates to be reassessed, as well as incorporate this information into a better assessment of the stocks and the development of a proper Annual Catch Limit (ACL).

The action being proposed to the Council is to recommend an option to ensure the sustainability of the gold coral fishery in the Western Pacific region. The Council may choose to take action on the following options:

- **Option 1: No action**

Option 1 would allow the moratorium on the harvest of gold coral to expire on September 11, 2013. Harvest of gold coral would be allowed and restricted to an Annual Catch Limit yet to be determined.

- **Option 2: Extend moratorium**

Option 2 would extend the moratorium on the harvest of gold coral in the Western Pacific an additional five years (until 2018). The extension of the moratorium would provide time for any additional research to inform the gold coral growth estimates, as well as provide time for the development of an ACL for gold coral based upon a re-assessment of the stock utilizing any new information available.

- **Option 3: Prohibit the take of gold coral**

Option 3 would implement an indefinite ban on the taking of gold coral in the Western Pacific region. An ACL would not be developed, and gold coral would continue to be a part of the Management Unit Species.

At its 155th meeting, the Council may choose one of these options, or develop its own, for further consideration and analysis for a final recommendation in 2013 prior to the moratorium expiration date.

2. Annual Catch Limits for American Samoa, Guam and Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Bottomfish, Crustaceans and Precious Corals

The Council will receive a P* Analysis by its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) on the Territory Bottomfish based on the most recent Stock Assessment by the Pacific Island Fisheries Science Center. The P* criteria will be similar to the ones used in the MHI Deep 7 Bottomfish. The selected P* will have a corresponding catch level or Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for a two year period, namely 2013 and 2014. The Council will consider whether it concurs with the SSC recommendations and establish an Annual Catch Limit, either equal to the ABC or at some level lower than ABC. The Council cannot specify an ACL higher than the ABC. A multi-year ABC and ACL will reduce administrative burden and would provide adequate time for new information to be gathered to improve ACL specifications.

- i. Crustaceans**
- ii. Precious corals**

The Council will receive a review of the ABC for the Territory Crustaceans (Kona crab, deep water shrimp, spiny and slipper lobsters) and precious corals. There is no current harvest for Kona crab and deep water shrimp. There has been no commercial record of slipper lobster landing in 2011 in all three territories. Previous studies in American Samoa indicated that slipper lobsters make up less than one percent of the total lobster landings. The current NMFS PIFSC Bio-Sampling Program estimated slipper lobster landing to be 0.9% of total lobster catch. Spiny lobster landings in 2011 in American Samoa and Guam slightly exceeded the specified ACLs (AS = 2,311 lbs out of 2,300 lbs catch limit; GU = 1,980 lbs out of 1,900 lbs catch limit) In CNMI slipper lobster landings were only 15% of the ACL (810 lbs out of 5,500 lbs catch limit). There is currently no precious coral fishery in the Territories. There is no new information available to make revisions to the ABC and subsequent ACL, which can be rolled over to the following fishing year.

3. Annual Catch Limits for Hawaii Non-Deep 7 Bottomfish Crustaceans and Precious Corals

i. Non Deep 7 Bottomfish

In 2011, the Council established the ACL = ABC for the Hawaii Non-Deep 7 Bottomfish for 2012. The Council will evaluate options for re-specification of the Hawaii Non Deep 7 Bottomfish based on the most recent data. The previous specification for ABC by the SSC utilized a model average of: 1) 50% risk of overfishing by analogy from the risk table of the MHI deep 7 bottomfish stock assessment; 2) 75th percentile of the entire catch time series; 3) mean of the last five years. Adding the most recent year (2011) data to the time series of the 75th percentile and mean of the last five years (2007 to 2011) slightly

changed the model average results. Using model averaging resulted in an ABC of 140,000 lbs. This is 5,000 lbs higher than the established ACL at 135,000 lbs. The total landings of the non-deep 3 bottomfish in 2011 were 131,391 lbs. Options for the Council include: 1) no action – maintain the current ACL at 135,000 lbs. This will not result in an additional administrative burden. The current ACL appears to be adequate in maintaining the fishery; 2) Increase the ACL by 5,000 lbs based on recent data – this will provide additional buffer in the catch relative to the possible ACL. This would also entail an additional administrative burden because a separate Environmental Assessment and NEPA document will be drafted. Catch levels at 140,000 lbs were not analyzed in the previous EA. The Council will also evaluate a multiyear specification to minimize the burden of annual specifications.

ii. Crustaceans

iii. Precious corals

The Council will receive the SSC review of the ABC for the Hawaii Crustaceans (Kona crab, deep water shrimp, spiny and slipper lobsters) and precious corals and will evaluate on specifying ACLs on a multi-year level. This will reduce administrative burden of doing evaluations on an annual basis. The Kona crab landings in 2011 were 11,049 lbs, while the ACL was 27,600 lbs. Deepwater shrimp landing last year was at 8,387 lbs out of a 250,773 lbs catch limit. The commercial landing for slipper lobsters was at 170 lbs out of 280 lbs catch limit. Spiny lobster landing was at 11,262 lbs which exceeded the ACL by 1,262 lbs. The precious coral fishery is currently inactive. There is no new information available to make revisions to the ABC thus the current ABC and subsequent ACL can be rolled over to the following fishing year.