Scientists to Consider Management Options for South Pacific Albacore Tuna

HONOLULU (25 February 2013) The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) that advises the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council will convene Feb. 26-28, 2013, at the Council office, 1164 Bishop St., Suite 1400, Honolulu, to discuss management of federally managed fisheries in Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and the remote US Pacific Island areas. The recommendations of the SSC and other Council advisory bodies will be considered by the Council when it convenes March 12-14, 2013, at the Governor H. Rex Lee Auditorium (Fale Laumei), Pago Pago, American Samoa. Recommendations by the Council are transmitted the US Secretary of Commerce for final approval.

Among the key issues to be considered is the management of the American Samoa South Pacific albacore fishery. The American Samoa longline fishery is the second largest fishery in the US Pacific Islands. The fishery is based almost entirely on fishing for South Pacific albacore caught for the American Samoa canning industry, with only a small domestic market, and limited access to overseas markets. This South Pacific albacore is also important to the central South Pacific countries neighboring American Samoa, which also supply the American Samoa canning and fish processing industry.

Catches of South Pacific albacore by all fleets south of the equator have more than doubled in the past decade and are currently about 90 percent of maximum sustainable yield. This is due primarily to the doubling of vessels from China fishing under access agreements with the Solomon Islands and switching by Taiwanese longliners from targeting bigeye to targeting albacore.

The SSC and Council will examine options and scenarios to maintain the viability and continuity of the American Samoa longline fishery. The SSC and Council will take into account current management measures, South Pacific albacore stock status, regional and sub-regional fishery management arrangements of neighboring countries belonging to the Forum Fisheries Agency and Te Vaka Moana, and likely Conservation and Management Measures (CMM) for South Pacific albacore implemented by the international Western and Central Pacific Fishery Commission.

Another key issue the SSC will consider is methods for establishing acceptable biological catch for stocks for which there is limited data. Currently, the SSC uses 75 percent of the historic catch in such cases. It will review and consider other methods for stocks in data poor situations.

For a complete agenda of the SSC and Council meetings, go to www.wpcouncil.org/meetings.

The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council was established by Congress to manage fisheries in offshore waters around Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, CNMI and the US Pacific remote island areas. For more information, visit www.wpcouncil.org or email info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov; phone (808) 522-8220, or fax (808) 522-8226.

Scientific and Statistical Committee: Dr. Charles Daxboeck, chair, (BioDax Consulting Tahiti); Dr. Judith Amesbury (Micronesian Archeological Research Services); Dr. Paul Callaghan (University of Guam retired); Dr. Frank A. Camacho (University of Guam); Dr. Milani Chaloupka (University of Queensland); Dr. Richard Deriso (Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission); Dr. Erik Franklin (Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology); Dr. John Hampton (Secretariat of the Pacific Community); David Itano (NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office); Dr. Pierre Kleiber (NMFS PIFSC, retired); Dr. Donald Kobayashi (NMFS PIFSC); Dr. Molly Lutcavage (University of New Hampshire); Todd Miller (CNMI Division of Fish & Wildlife); Dr. Domingo Ochivallo (American Samoa DMWR); Jim Lynch (K&L Gates); Dr. Minling Pan (NMFS PIFSC); Dr. Craig Severance (University of Hawaii retired); Dr. John Sibert (Pelagic Fisheries Research Program retired); and Dr. Robert Skillman (NMFS PIFSC retired).

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