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### American Samoa Longliners Encouraged to Work with Regional Fishery Group to Conserve South Pacific Albacore

UTULEI, AMERICAN SAMOA (15 March 2013) The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council yesterday concluded its three-day meeting at the Governor H. Rex Lee Auditorium (Fale Laumei) in American Samoa with recommendations for the management of federally regulated fisheries in the US Pacific Islands. Regulatory recommendations made by the Council are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval.

Among the key issues was management of the American Samoa longline fishery that targets South Pacific albacore tuna. Vessels from neighbor countries, such as the Cook Islands, also fish the same albacore stock and unload at the canneries located in Pago Pago, American Samoa. The overall catch of the stock is reaching maximum sustainable yield. The Council recommended that the American Samoa fishery continue to cooperate with the regional management arrangement Te Vaka Moana (TVM), an agreement among the fishery departments of Cook Islands, Niue, Tonga, Independent Samoa, Tokelau and New Zealand. The Council will work to secure observer status for the American Samoa government and the Council in TVM meetings, with a goal of strengthening the conservation and management measures of the Western and Central Pacific Fishery Commission (WCPFC) for the South Pacific albacore fishery across the entire range of the stock. The WCPFC measures apply only south of 20 degrees South.

The Council noted that the proposal of the Cook Islands Ministry of Marine Resources to establish a Satellite Office in Pago Pago reflects the importance of American Samoa as a regional fisheries hub. The Council will work with representatives of the American Samoa and Cook Islands governments to establish the satellite office so as to improve the Cook Islands' ability to monitor longline vessels fishing in the Cook Islands that land their catch in Pago Pago. The office will also enhance domestic implementation of international compliance and monitoring obligations stemming from the WCPFC.

The Council will also work with the American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to identify an immediate solution to the current lack of dock space in Pago Pago Harbor for American Samoa longline vessels.

In other matters affecting the Territory of American Samoa, the Council supported Governor Lolo Moliga's request to modify zone B (research zone) on the island of Aunu'u so subsistence fishing can occur for bottom-dwelling species and to remove the notification requirement before fishing in zone A. The Council also encouraged the American Samoa Government to comment on the proposed rule for fishing in the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument by the April 8, 2013, comment period closing date. The proposed regulations prohibit subsistence fishing 0 to 12 miles around Rose Atoll

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The Council also made recommendations concerning protected species, the fisheries in the Hawaii and Mariana Archipelagos, program planning and administrative matters, including the following among others:

- Proposed listing of 66 coral species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA): The Council found that the determination tool being used is biased toward listing due to its heavy reliance on high importance threats, lack of credible structural logic, and lack of methods to account for uncertainty of information and coral adaptability to threats and requests. The Council will ask NMFS to consider an alternative determination tool. A number of other scientific concerns include misidentification of some coral species proposed for listing, likely resulting in absence of quantitative abundance data and trends being for Indo-Pacific coral species proposed for listing.
- WCPFC measures to address Pacific-wide overfishing of bigeye tuna: The Council recommended that NMFS develop a proposal to cap vessel capacity in the purse-seine and longline fisheries in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean and develop a proposal that considers spatial management options for the longline fisheries targeting bigeye tuna, specifically taking into account the fishing locations of the Hawaii longline fishery which is predominately in areas with low fishing mortality levels.
- Mariana skipjack resource assessment: The Council will request that the NMFS Office of Law Enforcement provide the Council with catch information from foreign vessel incursion cases that have occurred in the Western Pacific Region and that all catches from such illegal fishing activities be assessed and evaluated.
- Main Hawaiian Islands bottomfish: Several recommendations were made for the fishery, including, among others, that the chair of the Department of Land and Natural Resources be engaged regarding the utility of the State's Bottomfish Restricted Fishing Areas (BRFAs) in federal waters; that the University of Hawaii present the results of research on larval dispersal between main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) and Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) to the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee; and that Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology continue its genetic studies to elucidate the connectivity of bottomfish populations between the NWHI, MHI, offshore banks, and Johnston Atoll.
- Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle: The Council expressed its disappointment regarding NMFS' decision to conduct a global status review of green turtles in response to the petition to designate the Hawaiian green turtles as a distinct population segment (DPS) and to delist the DPS from the ESA. The decision by NMFS resulted in the delay of the 12-month finding publication. The decision of whether to conduct a status review directly responding to the petition or in a broader context is at the discretion of the agency rather than policy directive. The Council urged NMFS and USFWS to expedite the review by prioritizing the decision regarding the Hawaiian green turtles and responding to the petition in a timely manner.

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The Council also voted to restructure its Sea Turtle Advisory Committee (STAC) and Marine Mammal Advisory Committee (MMAC) to establish a single Protected Species Advisory Committee with a minimum membership composition to include two sea turtle experts, two marine mammal experts, one seabird expert, one shark expert, and one coral and reef fish expert along with one representative from the SSC and one representative from its Advisory Panel.

Regarding the its advisory bodies, the Council appointed Erik C. Franklin to the Scientific and Statistical Committee, replacing Brian Bowen; Alice Lawrence to replace Mr. Benjamin Carroll on the American Samoa Archipelagic Plan Team; TeeJay Letalie to replace Mr. Nonu Tuisamoa as the American Samoa representative on the Pelagic Plan Team, and Sean McDuff to the Marianas Archipelagic Plan Team. The Council also decided to restructure the Non-commercial Advisory Committee as presented to base membership on established and active fishing clubs and organizations throughout the region that largely comprise non-commercial fishermen.

The Council is responsible for federally managed fisheries in Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and the remote US Pacific Island areas. For more information, go to [www.wpcouncil.org](http://www.wpcouncil.org) or email [info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov](mailto:info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov); phone (808) 522-8220, or fax (808) 522-8226.

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council: Appointees by the Secretary of Commerce from nominees selected by American Samoa, CNMI, Guam and Hawaii governors: William Sword (vice chair), recreational fisherman/civil engineer/manager (American Samoa); Michael Duenas (vice chair), Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam); Richard Seman (vice chair), education/outreach specialist (CNMI); Edwin Ebisui (vice chair), attorney (Hawaii); Michael Goto, United Fishing Agency (Hawaii); Julie Leialoha, environmentalist (Hawaii); and F. McGrew Rice, charter fisherman (Hawaii). Designated state officials: Arnold Palacios (chair), CNMI Department of Lands & Natural Resources; William Aila, Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources; Dr. Ruth Matagi-Tofiga, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources; and Mariquita Taitague, Guam Department of Agriculture. Designated federal officials: Michael Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office; Susan White, U.S. Fish and Wildlife; RAdm Charles Ray, U.S. Coast Guard 14th District; and Bill Gibbons-Fly, US Department of State.