

Catch Limits May Have Severe Negative, Social Impacts for US Pacific Islands

HONOLULU (22 October 2011) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council yesterday in Honolulu specified annual catch limits (ACLs) for federally managed species in the US Pacific islands as required by Congress. The ACLs apply to fish caught in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) waters 3 to 200 miles from shore around Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The ACLs for all of the species except deepwater precious corals are based on the acceptable biological catches (ABCs) recommended by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). Not specified were ACLs for main Hawaiian Islands deepwater bottomfish (i.e., Deep7) as they are managed under an existing annual limits; highly migratory pelagic species managed by an international regional fishery management organization; species with life spans of less than one year; and ecosystem component species that are not targeted and retained.

2012 Annual Catch Limits in Pounds for Fisheries in EEZ Waters				
Federally Managed Species	Am Samoa	CNMI	Guam	Hawaii
Reef Sharks	1,309	5,600	6,942	111,566
Bumphead parrotfish	235	797		-
Humphead wrasse	1,743	2,009	1,960	-
<i>Selar crumenophthalmus</i> (akule)	8,396	7,459	56,514	651,292
<i>Decapterus macarellus</i> (opelu)	-	-	-	393,563
Deepwater Shrimp	80,000	268,000	56,000	544,000
Spiny Lobster	2,300	5,500	2,700	10,000
Slipper Lobster	30	60	20	280
Kona Crabs	3,200	6,300	1,900	27,600
Other Crustacean	2,136		5,523	20,686
Bottomfish (all managed species)	99,200	48,200	182,500	-
Bottomfish (non-Deep7 species)	-	-	-	135,000
Acanthuridae – surgeonfish	19,516	6,884	70,702	80,545
Lutjanidae – snapper	18,839	3,905	17,726	65,102
Mullidae – goatfish	-	3,670	25,367	125,813
Mollusk	16,694	4,446	21,941	28,765
Carangidae – jacks	9,490	21,512	45,377	193,423
Lethrinidae – emperor	7,350	27,466	38,720	-
Scaridae – parrotfish	8,145	3,784	28,649	33,326
Serranidae – grouper	5,600	5,519	17,958	-
Holocentridae – squirrelfish	2,585	-	8,300	44,122
Mugilidae – mullet	2,857	3,308	15,032	41,112
Siganidae – rabbitfish	-	2,537	26,120	-
Kyphosidae – chubs/rudderfish	-	-	13,247	-
Labridae – wrasse	-	-	5,195	-
Algae	-	-	5,329	-
Other coral reef managed species	18,910	9,820	83,214	142,282

The Council said the ACLs for the coral reef and bottomfish fisheries are unrealistically low and may have severe negative social and economic impacts. The low numbers are a result of monitoring program limitations that led to significant underestimates of catches, as well as insufficient or non-existent biological assessments. The Council directed the SSC to revisit the ABC estimates in March 2012 and utilize all available information to calculate new ABC estimates for 2013. The Council reiterated the urgent need to improve fishery data collection in all island areas. Council staff will work with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to identify concrete steps to improve fishery data collection. The Council recommended that state and territorial governments implement regulations that are compatible to the ACL measures.

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For black coral, the Council recommended an ACL of 5,500 lbs for Hawaii, 790 lbs for American Samoa, 2,100 lbs for CNMI and 700 lbs for Guam. For deepwater precious corals, the Council recommended maintaining the current harvest limits for pink and bamboo corals in conditional and established beds of Hawaii, but on an annual basis instead of a biennial basis. The recommended quotas for pink and bamboo coral, respectively, are 1,000 kg and 250 kg for the Makapuu Bed, 111 kg and 28 kg for 180 Fathom Bank, 444 kg and 111 kg for Brooks Bank, 67 kg and 17 kg for Kaena Point Bed, 67 kg and 17 kg for Keahole Bed, and 0 kg and 0 kg for the Westpac Bed. For deepwater precious coral exploratory areas of Hawaii, American Samoa, CNMI and Guam, the Council recommended maintaining the existing quota of 1,000 kg per exploratory area. Council recommendations are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval.

In other matters, the Council yesterday made the following recommendations:

- **Proposed American Samoa National Marine Sanctuary announced in the Federal Register yesterday:** An extension to the comment period, which ends on Jan. 6, 2012, will be requested to allow the Council time to consider the draft management plan and proposed regulations and their potential effects on the current fisheries management regime in American Samoa. Under the National Marine Sanctuary Act, the Regional Fishery Management Councils are afforded the opportunity to develop fishing regulations in a national marine sanctuary. The Council will ask the National Marine Sanctuary Program to make available before January 2012 maps that clearly delineate American Samoa territorial waters. It will ask American Samoa to develop a GIS-based map of existing marine managed areas and areas of concern (e.g., cliff lines, dangerous currents). The Council will take action on the draft management plan and regulations for the proposed sanctuary at its next meeting, March 26-30, 2012, in Guam and CNMI.
- **Ban on “big fish” (i.e., sharks, bumphead parrotfish, large groupers, jacks and humphead wrasse) by American Samoa as proposed by its Coral Reef Advisory Group:** The Council will ask NMFS to study the biological and socioeconomic impacts, and institutional capability of implementing the ban.
- **Marianas Trench Marine National Monument Workshop:** The Council expressed deep concern that the NMFS-organized workshop on the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument, held this September in Kona, Hawaii, lacked representation by indigenous communities from CNMI and Guam and that the Monument Advisory Council (MAC) lacks Guam representation. The Council said indigenous representation is needed at future Monument meetings. It recommended NMFS and US Fish and Wildlife Service convene the Marianas Trench Marine MAC immediately, pursuant to the Presidential proclamation. The Monument was established in January 2009. The MAC has not yet been convened.
- **Marianas Islands Range Complex:** The Council reiterated the importance of the Department of Defense consulting with the fishing community on changes to the Marianas Islands Training and Testing area.

The Council meeting continues today to address Hawaii non-commercial data collection, Hawaii bottomfish essential fish habitat, American Samoa swordfish longline fishery and striped marlin catch limits. For more information, visit www.wpcouncil.org, email info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or phone (808) 522-8220.

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council: Appointees by the Secretary of Commerce from nominees selected by American Samoa, CNMI, Guam and Hawaii governors: Manuel Duenas, Guam Fishermen’s Cooperative Association (Guam) (Chair) ; Stephen Haleck, business owner (American Samoa) (Vice Chair); David Itano, researcher (Hawaii) (Vice Chair); William Sword, recreational fisherman (American Samoa); Richard Seman, education and outreach specialist (CNMI); Julie Leialoha, environmentalist (Hawaii); Sean Martin, Pacific Ocean Producers (Hawaii); and F. McGrew Rice, charter fisherman (Hawaii). Designated state officials: Arnold Palacios, CNMI Department of Land & Natural Resources; Mariquita Taitague, Guam Department of Agriculture; William Aila, Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources; and Ray Tulafono, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources. Designated federal officials: Michael Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office; Don Palawski, U.S. Fish and Wildlife; RAdm Charles Ray, U.S. Coast Guard 14th District; and Bill Gibbons-Fly, U.S. Department of State.