

Press Release

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WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Federal Fishery Managers to Address Marine National Monument Fishing Regulations

SAIPAN, CNMI (6 March 2012) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, which makes recommendations to the Secretary of Commerce for the management of fisheries in federal waters surrounding the U.S. Pacific Islands, today completed its two-day meeting at the Saipan Fiesta Resort and Spa in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and now moves to the Hilton Guam Resort and Spa, Tumon Bay, Guam, where it will reconvene from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. March 8 and from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on March 9. Joining the Council members from the State of Hawaii and the US Territories of CNMI, Guam and American Samoa is National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Acting Administrator Sam Rauch. As part of the meeting, the Council will hold a Fishers Forum on Climate Change from 6 to 9 p.m. on March 8 at the Hilton Guam Resort. The public is invited to attend all Council meetings.

While in CNMI, the Council heard several presentations and numerous public comments regarding the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument. The Council is tasked with drafting fishing regulations for the monument. The public voiced their disappointment that assurances by James Conaughton, chair of the Council on Environmental Quality under the Bush Administration, are not being honored. John Joyner, senior policy adviser for the Office of the Governor, and Council member Arnold Palacios, who is a former CNMI Speaker of the House and current director of the Department of Lands and Natural Resources, said the CNMI was told that it would have management authority, as well as rights to access and traditional indigenous fishing, in the monument. Joyner and Palacios postulate that these promises are not being honored due to the fact that they were not included in the Presidential Proclamation that created the monument. The CNMI residents compared this to the US taking of the marine waters around the CNMI because “waters” was not specifically mentioned in the Covenant between the then sovereign Northern Mariana Islands and the United States in 1975 bringing the CNMI into political union with the United States. The CNMI is the only US state/territory that does not have state/territorial waters recognized by the federal government.

The Council also discussed several issues regarding annual catch limits (ACLs) for the Mariana archipelago (Guam and CNMI). In accordance with the 2006 revised Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, all federally managed fish are required to have ACLs by 2012. Due to lack of catch data and life history information of the fish species, the 2012 ACLs for the Marianas fisheries are artificially low, which may unnecessarily cause harm to fishing communities. To view the 2012 ACLs, please go to http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/SFD/SFD_regs_1.html or contact the Council at info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov.

The Council also discussed providing assistance to CNMI to develop aquaculture in the islands and the possibility of easing the measures that restrict vessels greater than 40 feet in length from fishing for bottomfish in waters from 0 to 50 miles from shore around the CNMI southern islands, as well as issues regarding sharks and military activities impacting Mariana fishing communities. The Council will take up final discussion and action on these topics when it reconvenes on Guam. For more information, visit www.wpcouncil.org or contact the Council at info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or by phone at (808) 522-8220, (671) 287-9482 or (670) 688-6400.

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.