

Press Release

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WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Federal Fishery Council Agrees on American Samoa Swordfish Fishery Measures, Recommends Regional Tuna Management Measures

TUMON BAY, GUAM (9 March 2012) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council today in Guam agreed to management measures that would permit a longline fishery for swordfish to develop in American Samoa. Measures currently in place inhibit the fishery as they require longline vessels to set hooks below 100 meters to deter interactions with sea turtles. The new measures would allow longline vessels to set in shallower depths, where the swordfish are found, but take observers on the vessels when required by NMFS to document interactions with sea turtles and seabirds. The measures mimic those in place for the Hawaii longline fishery, including the requirements to use large circle hooks and mackerel bait to mitigate sea turtle interactions.

The Council also made a series of recommendations for the management and conservation of tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. These tuna stocks are managed internationally by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), to which the United States is a party. The WCPFC is scheduled to convene its 8th regular meeting March 26-30, 2012, in Guam. During that meeting, the Council recommends that the United States advocate for the following:

- 5,000 mt fresh fish bigeye tuna allocation for the United States in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO). The current limit is 3,763 mt, which is 90% of the 2004 harvest by Hawaii longline fleet. The Council basis this recommendation on modeling that suggests catches at these levels would not impact the stock. Additionally, the Hawaii longline fishery is a model fishery supplying fresh fish solely for domestic consumption.
- Catch limits provided to the US territories are not diminished, and the territories status and rights are further associated with the aspirations of the small island developing states (SIDS) to develop their pelagic fisheries.
- The total WCPO longline catch should not be reduced further than the requirements in Conservation Management Measure (CMM) 2008-01, since the region-wide total catch met the target established by the CMM and reductions in purse seine bigeye tuna catches will have a greater positive impact on the bigeye maximum sustainable yield.
- No tolerance for increases by the Chinese longline fishery in the WCPO as this fleet has increased its bigeye catch from about 2,000 mt in 2000 to 11,565 in 2009. Longline catches of bigeye in 2010 are likely to exceed 12,000 mt.
- Effort in the purse seine fishery limited to 2010 levels, recognizing that effort limits must be augmented by other effective management measures that limit the impact of the purse seine fishery on bigeye and yellowfin tuna, as well as a precautionary limit for skipjack tuna.

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- A total purse seine seasonal closure, mainly because it promotes greater compliance than the current seasonal closure only around fish aggregation devices (FADs).
- The drafting of a binding proposal with other WCPFC country members to clearly limit or reduce purse seine and longline capacity in the WCPO.mm

Among other recommendations, the Council recognized the importance of FADs in offsetting the rising costs of recreational and charter fishing and urged the Government of Guam to facilitate the replacement and servicing of government-deployed FADs. Further, the Council will investigate the potential for implementing a community FAD project on Guam in order to augment the benefits from government-deployed FADs. The Council also recommended that the US Coast Guard, in consultation with the territories, install aids to navigation at boat ramp locations in American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and Guam to enhance boating safety for fishermen.

The meeting concluded with the Council recognition of Paul Callaghan, former director of the Guam Department of Commerce, former Council member and chair of the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) for 30 years. Callaghan is stepping down as SSC chair but remaining on the Committee. He will also be leaving Guam, where he has resided for more than 40 years.

The Council also recognized AJ Tornito of Okkudo High School, Dededo, Guam, who took first place in the Council's photo essay contest in Guam on traditional knowledge and climate change. Tornito will travel with his counterparts from Hawaii, CNMI and American Samoa to attend the First Stewards Climate Change Symposium and Living Earth Festival, at the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC, July 17-20 and July 20-22, 2012. The students will present their photo essays at these events.

The Council is the body created by Congress to manage fisheries in offshore waters around Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, CNMI and the US Pacific remote island areas. Regulatory recommendations by the Council are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval.

For more information, visit www.wpcouncil.org or contact the Council at info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or by phone at (808) 383-1069, (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.