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FISHERY  
MANAGEMENT  
COUNCIL

## **-Press Release**

**For Immediate Release**

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### **Federal Fishery Council to Address Management of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands**

The **Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council)** will meet **March 18 - 21, 2002**, at the **Ala Moana Hotel** in Honolulu to discuss fishery management in federal waters (generally, 3 to 200 miles offshore) surrounding Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and U.S. Pacific Island possessions. Among the key items to be discussed are the following:

**Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI)** The Council has been managing fisheries in federal waters of the NWHI since 1976 when the Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Act) was approved by Congress. Prior to this, foreign vessels fished the area heavily up to the shoreline, using destructive gears such as trawls and tangle-nets. With the implementation of the Act and the Council's fishery management plans, uncontrolled foreign fishing was eliminated and the marine resources of the NWHI have been protected for 25 years. Under strict limited entry programs, only 17 bottomfish and 15 lobster permits are issued in this 1,200 mile zone. There are no overfished stocks and the habitats are pristine, according to the scientists who conducted ecological assessments of the area in 2000. However, future fisheries management of the NWHI is now in question. NOAA announced the Clinton NWHI Coral Reef Reserve is in place as an interim management measure before the designation of a National Marine Sanctuary. It is uncertain how this process will relate to the Council's Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan, which will be released for final public comments this Monday. The fishery management plan was developed over a five year period, and incorporates measures to limit bycatch and protect sensitive habitat, while allowing for current sustainable fisheries to operate. This issue, among others, will be discussed with William Hogarth, NOAA Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, on **Wednesday, March 20 at 1:30 p.m.**

Copies of the Coral Reef Ecosystems Fishery Management Plan will be available from

the Council as a hard copy, CD-Rom, or can be downloaded off the website at [www.wpcouncil.org](http://www.wpcouncil.org). Written comments are due by May 18, 2002 to the National Marine Fisheries Service, Pacific Islands Area Office.

In addition, the Council will consider the recommendations from its Scientific and Statistical Committee, plan teams and advisory panel, and take action on the following items:

**Limited entry program for the American Samoa longline fishery** The Council will consider limiting the number of vessels allowed into the American Samoa longline fishery, due to concerns about a dramatic increase in the fishing effort in 2001. Unlike Hawaii, fishing vessels in American Samoa are confined to fishing within their EEZ, and competition for the resources could result in problems for the local community.

**Amendment to designate essential fish habitat in certain fishery management plans** The Exclusive Economic Zone surrounding the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and the Pacific Remote Island Areas (Howland, Baker, Jarvis, Wake, Kingman, Johnston, and Palmyra) are proposed for inclusion in the Bottomfish, Crustacean and Precious Corals fishery management plans. Essential fish habitat (EFH), which is designed to protect areas of ecological significance to fish, will be designated for these areas. Additional species of bottomfish are proposed to more accurately represent species harvested in these areas. The Council will also consider EFH for the new species, and take final action on the amendment.

**Options for managing the Cross Seamount/NOAA weather buoy fishery** The offshore tuna handline fishery, primarily located on the Cross Seamount, continues to generate concerns due to the high volume of juvenile yellowfin and bigeye tuna caught in this location, and its effects on tuna stocks around Hawaii. Concerns have been raised about uncontrolled entry by the longline vessels from other fishery sectors.

**Northwestern Hawaiian Islands bottomfish management** The Council will consider a fishery management plan amendment, which would modify the annual landing requirements. The objective of the amendment is to provide adequate opportunities to participate in this healthy fishery, while ensuring that permits are allocated fairly.

For more information, contact the Council at 522-8220; e-mail [nmfs.wprfmc@noaa.gov](mailto:nmfs.wprfmc@noaa.gov); or log on to [www.wpcouncil.org](http://www.wpcouncil.org).