



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Fishery Council Approves Limited Entry Program for American Samoa Longline Fishery

After intensive deliberations, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council concluded their week-long meeting today by voting to approve a limited entry program for the longline fishery in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) around American Samoa. Discussions on this issue began in 1997, due to concerns about rapid expansion of fishing effort and fleet size in the longline fishery around American Samoa. Between 1997 and 2002, the fleet increased from approximately 21 mostly small vessels to 75 vessels of a variety of sizes. The large vessels target albacore tuna to sell to the canneries at Pago Pago Harbor, so most of the fish never reach the local community. The Council focused on developing a limited entry program which would keep the fishery healthy, without overly hampering its development and limiting the benefits to the local community.

For years, the groups representing different sides of this controversial issue have been meeting to hammer out an agreement which would be acceptable to everyone involved. Afoa Lutu, who came and testified on behalf of the local American Samoan longline fishermen, was thrilled with the decision. "I feel great" he said after the vote was approved by the Council. "It was a long process, but we finally got it." He also acknowledged Henry Sesepasara, American Samoan advisor to the Council, and Paul Bartram, Council contractor, who worked tirelessly to reach this agreement.

John LaGrange, representative for the South Pacific Longliner group, was equally happy with the decision. “The agreement means that both sides are able to come together and move forward as a single group from now on” he stated. “I feel very good about that.”

The recommendations will now be forwarded to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce for approval. Examples of recommendations made by the Council include the following:

- to qualify for a longline permit, an individual must have owned a longline vessel on March 21, 2002 and pelagic (open ocean) species must have been landed in American Samoa prior to this date, using longline gear;
- permits for vessels larger than 40 ft will be transferable to anyone with documented longline catch landed in American Samoa;
- permits for vessels smaller than 40 ft will be transferable to a permit holders family, or to a local community;
- no one entity will be allowed to own more than 10% of total permits;
- certain permits will be allowed to upgrade to a larger size vessel;
- to keep their permit, vessels less than or equal to 50 ft must land at least 1,000 lbs of pelagic fish every three calendar years; vessels over 50 ft must land at least 5,000 lbs;
- all permit holders will be required to annually attend vessel safety and protected species workshops;
- the program will be reexamined after 3 years to see it is meeting its objectives.

For a complete listing of the Council’s recommendations, contact the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council in Honolulu at (808) 522-8220 (phone); (808) 522-8226 (fax); info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov (e-mail), or log on to www.wpcouncil.org.

The Council is the policy-making organization for the management of fisheries in the exclusive economic zone (generally, 3-200 miles from shore) around American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Hawaii, and U.S. Pacific Island possessions - an area of nearly 1.5 million square miles.