



WESTERN  
PACIFIC  
REGIONAL  
FISHERY  
MANAGEMENT  
COUNCIL

## Press Release

For Immediate Release

March 11, 2002

Contact: Cindy Knapman, 522-5341

---

# Fisheries Scientists Discuss Seabird Bycatch, Marine Protected Areas

Scientists and environmental experts from throughout the United States and the Pacific will convene in Honolulu March 12<sup>th</sup> through the 14<sup>th</sup> to discuss fishery management issues in the U.S. Pacific islands. Among the key items to be discussed are the following:

**Underwater setting chute:** The longline fishing industry, environmental organizations and government are working together to significantly reduce the unwanted catch of seabirds in the Hawaii longline fishery. An experiment is currently underway in fishing grounds north of Hawaii to test the chute, which delivers baited hooks underwater out of sight and reach of diving seabirds, instead of on the surface where they are at risk of being hooked or entangled.

**Marine Protected Areas (MPAs):** MPAs are becoming increasingly popular as a management tool to protect coral reef resources and habitats. However, hard evidence supporting the effectiveness these areas is almost non-existent, and arbitrary establishment in certain areas could cause profound socioeconomic impacts to the surrounding communities. The group will review studies conducted in Hawaii state waters (0 - 3 miles from shore) to determine how to design future MPAs which balance conservation and sustainable use.

**The State of Hawaii Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Fishery Management Area regulatory proposal:** The State is proposing an amendment to the Hawaii Administrative Rules which would, among others, limit entry into State waters of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands by permit only, limit fishing to line gear only (such as trolling, handline, and pole and line),

prohibit setting foot on shore, and prohibit the destruction of any coral.

**Hawaii Marine Recreational Fishing Survey (HMRFS):** Marine recreational and subsistence fishing is an important activity to many residents of Hawaii. However, this can have a significant impact on the resource, and it is important for fisheries managers to gather data such as the number, length and weight of fish harvested, the composition of the catch, the numbers of people fishing, and the total number of trips that they make. The National Marine Fisheries Service and the Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources are collecting this data, and will be reporting on their results.

**American Samoa limited entry program:** The number of fishing vessels participating in the American Samoa longline fishery doubled in 2001, and the level of fishing effort in terms of hooks quadrupled. A 50 mile area closure for large vessels (over 50 feet) was implemented recently, however there is still a concern about unconstrained entry of fishing vessels into the fishery. The group will discuss alternatives for limiting entry into the fishery, and will make recommendations to the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) at the next meeting.

The 15 scientists are members of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), which advise the Council. In addition to the item listed above, they will be formulating recommendations on: **Options for managing the Cross Seamount/NOAA weather buoy fishery; Northwestern Hawaiian Islands bottomfish management; amendments to all fisheries management plans to re-address bycatch; and an amendment to designate essential fish habitat in certain fishery management plans.** These recommendations will be reviewed by the Council at its next meeting, March 18<sup>th</sup> through the 21<sup>st</sup> at the Ala Moana Hotel. For more information on these or other items, contact the Council at 522-8220 or log on to the Council website at [www.wpcouncil.org](http://www.wpcouncil.org).