



**WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL**

Press Release

For Immediate Release

April 21, 2003

Contact: Paul Dalzell 522-6042

The Western Pacific Council today celebrated the implementation of a new National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Pacific Islands Region. This new region encompasses the US Flag Pacific Islands that comprise the jurisdiction of the Council, and includes the State of Hawaii, Territories of American Samoa and Guam and the , Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and several small atolls (Wake, Johnston, Howland & Baker, Palmyra & Kingman Reef, Jarvis) under civilian or military administration.

The implementation of the new region marks the culmination of much effort by this Council to place the Pacific Islands on an equal footing with other NMFS administrative regions in the US (Alaska, Northwest, Southwest, Southeast and Northwest). Until recently, the US Flag Pacific Islands were incorporated within NMFS' Southwest Region, which also includes California. The Southwest Regional Office and Science Center were based in Longbeach and La Jolla respectively, and all management decisions relating to the US Pacific Islands were transmitted through these offices prior to being forwarded to NMFS Headquarters office in Washington, DC. Council Executive Director Kitty Simonds stated that "the Pacific Islands Region has now been "liberated" from its ties with the US West Coast, and will liaise and report directly to NMFS HQ, and more of the decisions that may affect fisheries in the Pacific Islands will be made internally within the region". Simonds also thanked Senator Daniel Inouye and his staff for their support for the implementation of the new NMFS region.

Dr Judith Guthertz, the Chair of the Western Pacific Council and member for Guam, noted "that a lot of hard work and cooperation between the Council, Congress and the National Marine Fisheries Service had made the new Pacific Islands Region a reality. Guthertz said she was delighted that NMFS had finally acknowledged the cultural and ecological uniqueness of the US Pacific Islands by designating them collectively as a new administrative region. She added that "the Council looks forward to working with the new Regional Administrator to help address the needs of the islanders who live in the US Pacific Islands".

Another important step in this direction has been the search for local people to fill the positions

of the Pacific Islands Regional Administrator and Science Center Director. NMFS has already responded to the need for local recruitment by appointing Dr. Sam Pooley as the acting Regional Administrator and Dr. Jeff Polovina as the acting Science Center Director. Former NMFS Honolulu Laboratory Director, Richard Shomura noted that “both have been scientists at this fisheries laboratory with many years experience working in Hawaii and the Pacific Islands area. The Council hopes that the permanent appointments for these two critical positions will be recruited locally and the successful candidates will have an in-depth knowledge of the unique features and cultural aspects of the new region.

These unique features include jurisdiction over almost half of US EEZ waters (1.5 million square miles of ocean) but less than 1% of the US land area, 86% of all the coral reefs in the US, culturally diverse populations of Polynesians and Micronesians supplemented by East Asian, Southeast Asian, and Latin America immigrants, per-capita fish consumption more than twice the US national average, high participation rates for recreational and subsistence fishing, narrow economic bases in which fishing is a vital economic component, and indigenous populations for whom fish, fishing and marine lore are central cultural aspects.

The Pacific Islands Region will also be the only NMFS region that is entirely within warm tropical and sub-tropical waters. As a component of the Southwest Region, the fisheries of the Pacific Islands were at times forgotten in the competition for financial and manpower resources with those surrounding salmon, groundfish and coastal pelagic resources of California. Council member Roy Morioka stated that “as a new region, the Pacific Islands Region will be better placed to respond to national issues such as marlin management and attempts by recreational fishery advocacy groups to make catch and release of such fish mandatory, which could have severe negative impacts on fisheries and fish processors in the region. The development of the new Pacific Islands Region means that management issues are dealt with effectively at a regional level, by managers and scientists who are familiar with the conditions within which they work”.

The Western Pacific 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 US Pacific Island possessions. For more information, contact the Council at 522-8220, e-mail info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov, or log on to www.wpcouncil.org.

