



Federal Fishery Managers Deny Hawaii Longline Fishery Exemption

HONOLULU (21 December 2006) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, convening by teleconference today in Hawaii, unanimously opposed the request by an 84-year-old indigenous Hawaiian fisherman for an exemption to the 25- to 75-nautical mile longline exclusion zone around the Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI). The fisherman had requested that an allowance be made that would allow him to use 7 miles of "basket-style" longline gear within the closed area. This type of gear, which predates monofilament line currently in use by the longline fishery, consists of cotton, nylon or other synthetic line covered in tar, which sinks the line quickly. Current regulations allow the use of basket-gear in 1-mile lengths. The fisherman requesting the exemption predominantly fishes for akule (mackerel scad) and hoped to use the basket-style longline when akule is not in season, as he had done prior to the 1991 regulations that created the longline area closure. He said he tried earlier this year to use the basket gear in 1-mile segments, but it moved so much, due to weather or the fish on the line, that it was difficult for him to relocate the multiple segments of line. The Council's decision to deny the request came in large part from the memory of the conflicts between longline fishermen and small commercial, recreational and charter fishermen prior to the establishment of longline exclusion area.

While the Council denied the request for the exemption, they did pass a motion directing its staff to develop Community Development Programs (CDPs) for pelagic fisheries in the Western Pacific Region, which would address, among other options, basket-style gear. The CDPs are authorized by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act as a means to provide indigenous communities access to federal fisheries. Council had developed a CDP for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands limited entry bottomfish fishery, which provides 2 of 10 allowable permits in the Mau Zone (federal water surrounding Nihoa and Necker Islands) to eligible Hawaiian communities. However, the creation of the NWHI Coral Reef Reserve and then the NWHI Marine National Monument placed a moratorium on new entries to the NWHI bottomfish fishery and established a five-year phase out of the entire fishery, making that CDP obsolete.

In other matters, the Council also voted to forward the following recommendations to the Secretary of Commerce for approval:

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- Reduce the maximum sustainable yield for the black coral fishery in the Auau Channel (between the islands of Maui and Lanai) by 25 percent and set this as the quota for the entire bed (both state and federal waters);
- Establish a control date of Dec. 21, 2006, for future management of the black coral fishery;
- Establish a five-year moratorium on the harvest of gold coral (both live and dead) in the Western Pacific Region; and
- Add *Heterocarpus* (deepwater shrimp) species to appropriate management plan(s) as a management unit species and require fishermen to have a permit for and report their catches of this species.

Regarding the precious coral fishery, the Council also further directed its staff to evaluate the creation of a limited access program for the main Hawaiian Islands black coral fishery. The accumulation of regulations for the fishery led one black coral fisherman to suggest that the government just “shut down the [fishery] altogether” and buy out the fishermen. The Council also recommended that the moratorium on gold coral be accompanied by a research program to determine the growth, recruitment, mortality and deterioration rates for this species and that the ecosystem functions of dead gold coral be assessed and methods to distinguish harvested dead from harvested live gold coral be developed.

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, by Congressional mandate, is made up of the following 16 representatives.

Four designated state officials: Ignacio Dela Cruz, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands (CNMI) Department of Land & Natural Resources; Adrienne Loerzel, Guam Office of the Governor; Ray Tulafono, American Samoa Department of Marine & Wildlife Resources; and Peter Young, Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources

Four designated federal officials: RAdm Sally Brice-O’Hara, U.S. Coast Guard 14th District; Bill Gibbons-Fly, U.S. Department of State; Jerry Leinecke, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and Bill Robinson, Pacific Islands Regional Office, National Marine Fisheries Service

Eight members who are nominated by the governors of Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa and CNMI and selected by the Secretary of Commerce: Manuel Duenas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam); Frederick Duerr, resort and hotel consultant (Hawaii); Edwin Ebisui, attorney at law (Hawaii); Rick Gaffney, boat dealer and ocean recreation consultant (Hawaii); Stephen Haleck, business owner (hotel and gas station) (American Samoa); Sean Martin, Pacific Ocean Producers (Hawaii); Frank McCoy, Harbor & Environmental Services (American Samoa); and Benigno Sablan, cultural practitioner (CNMI)

The Council manages fisheries in offshore waters surrounding Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, CNMI and other U.S. Pacific islands. For more information, ph. 808 522-8220, fax 808 522-8226, email info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov, or visit www.wpcouncil.org.