



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

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Federal Fishery Managers to Address Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, Sharks, Longline Fisheries, Deepwater Shrimp

HONOLULU (13 October 2006) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will convene 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Oct. 16, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oct. 17 and 18, and 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Oct. 19, 2006, at the Hibiscus Ballroom, Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu to review and vote on a variety of fishery management measures for the U.S. Pacific Islands. Key items include fishing regulations for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) Marine National Monument, procedures to close the Hawaii longline fishery when it reaches its annual interaction limit for sea turtles, management of sharks in Hawaii, management of deepwater shrimp and management of fisheries around fish aggregation devices (FADs) in American Samoa. Recommendations passed by the Council are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval.

The Council meeting on Oct. 17 will open with an awards ceremony for the winners of the Council-sponsored Hawaii Archipelago Ecosystem Poster Contest. Jeff Coelho, special advisor to Mayor Mufi Hannemann and the City of County of Honolulu's director of customer services, will announce the winners and present them with prizes.

As part of the Council meeting, a Fishers Forum will be held 6 to 9 p.m. Oct. 17. Fishermen and other interested members of the public are invited to discuss issues related to shark management (including the shark viewing operations on Oahu's North Shore), mercury in tuna and other health-related seafood issues, and Hawaii's fishing communities.

The Council is the policy-making organization for fisheries management in federal waters (generally 3-200 miles offshore) of the U.S. Pacific Islands. For more information, contact the Council at (808) 522-8220, info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or www.wpcouncil.org.

BACKGROUND

NWHI Monument (scheduled for afternoon of Tuesday, Oct. 17)

On June 15, 2006, President George W. Bush issued Presidential Proclamation No. 8031 establishing the NWHI Marine National Monument. The Proclamation directs the Secretaries of Commerce and the Interior to promulgate regulations to restrict access to the monument, prohibit commercial fishing in Ecological Reserves and Special Preservation Areas, establish annual

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catch limits for bottomfish and pelagic species, prohibit anchoring, and require vessel monitoring systems on all domestic vessels, among other management measures. Because the Presidential Proclamation and its implementing final rules are exempt from administrative rulemaking procedures and judicial reviews, no environmental review to assess the biological or social impacts of the monument regulations has been conducted. However, affected NWHI fishermen have already pointed out issues that will severely restrict their ability to fish in the NWHI under the monument provisions.

ISSUE 1: FISHING FOR FIVE YEARS PARADOX

While Presidential Proclamation No. 8031 allows commercial fishing for bottomfish and pelagic species to continue for five years, some NWHI fishermen have expressed grave concern that the prohibition on fishing within Ecological Reserves and Special Preservation Areas, combined with the no-anchoring provision, will make it virtually impossible to catch bottomfish fish within the monument. Currently, the impacts of these provisions primarily affect fishers in NWHI Hoomalu Zone (from French Frigate Shoals to Kure Atoll) as the two Ecological Reserves and seven of the nine Special Preservation Areas are located in this zone. However, among the individual Hoomalu Zone fishers, the restrictions affect catches and revenues differently as each fisher has different fishing areas within the zone. To alleviate the “unintended consequences” of the monument designation, the Council staff is proposing to alter the zoning structure of the NWHI permit areas which may allow NWHI bottomfish permit holders to fish in open areas throughout the NWHI.

ISSUE 2: FISHING OUTSIDE THE MONUMENT

Despite demonstrated participation in fishing the NWHI, several commercial pelagic troll and handline fishermen licensed by the State of Hawaii have been immediately ousted from the NWHI and displaced from their traditional fishing grounds. These fishermen have expressed interest in continuing to fish commercially for pelagic species seaward of the outer boundary of the monument. They have also expressed interest in retaining uku (grey snapper), a bottomfish management unit species which is incidentally caught when trolling for ono (wahoo) and other pelagic species around NWHI banks. Currently, federal regulations prohibit harvesting bottomfish management unit species in the NWHI without a permit issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Pacific Islands Regional Office, making NWHI uku a regulatory discard for fishermen who do not have a federal NWHI bottomfish permit. The Council will review several options that would maintain NWHI fishing opportunities for Hawaii’s troll and handline fishermen seaward of the outer boundary of the monument, and eliminate regulatory discarding of uku by this fishery.

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Deepwater Shrimp Management (scheduled for afternoon of Tuesday, Oct. 17)

In 1999, the Council declined to add deep-water shrimp (*Heterocarpus laevigatus* and *Heterocarpus ensifer*) to the Crustaceans Fishery Management Plan (FMP) list of management unit species (MUS). A small-scale fishery for these species exists. Currently, data is collected through the State of Hawaii's commercial catch reports. However, no monitoring of the fishery is currently occurring. As the Council moves towards amending its FMPs to Fishery Ecosystem Plans (FEPs), it may want to look at adding these species to the MUS list, to collect the data and monitor the fishery. The Council will consider this at its 135th meeting.

Swordfish Closure (scheduled for afternoon of Wednesday, Oct. 18)

In 2006, the Hawaii swordfish fishery reached its limit of loggerhead turtle interactions (17) compared to 12 interactions in 2005. Under the Pelagics Fisheries Management Plan (PFMP), there is currently a seven-day "grace" period following the announcement that the interaction level is reached during which fishing may continue. However, there is concern that additional turtles may be caught during this grace period and thus exceed the authorized cap of 17 interactions authorized for this fishery under the Endangered Species Act Biological Opinion issued by NMFS. The Council will consider modifying existing regulations to close the fishery immediately upon its reaching either the 17 loggerhead or 16 leatherback turtle interaction cap.

Shark Management (scheduled for afternoon of Wednesday, Oct. 18)

In 1999, the Council recommended a suite of measures under its PFMP to manage shark catches by both pelagic and demersal longline vessels in the Western Pacific Region. They included a fleet-wide quota for blue sharks retained for finning, a trip limit on landings of non-blue sharks and a definition and prohibition of demersal longlining to catch sharks contained in the pelagic management unit. Subsequent events made the majority of the measures in the draft amendment largely redundant. However, the Council has continued to monitor non-blue shark catches. The Council has also deliberated on the impacts of commercial tour operators offering shark viewing tours to the public. At its 135th meeting, the Council may therefore decide to take initial action on the management of non-blue sharks for the Hawaii longline fishery and on shark viewing operations in Hawaii.

American Samoa FADs (scheduled for afternoon of Wednesday, Oct. 18)

Despite the implementation of 50 nautical mile area closures to pelagic fishing vessels of greater than 50 feet, pelagic troll fishermen, primarily recreational fishermen, have made requests to the Council for additional protection from competition with small-scale alia catamaran longliners fishing around the main island of Tutuila. At its 135th meeting, the Council may therefore decide to take initial action on managing longline fishing around fish aggregating devices (FADs) in American Samoa.

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Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council Members

The 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
- 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
- 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)
- Benigno Sablan, cultural practitioner (CNMI)