



Federal Fishery Managers Address Impacts of NWHI Monument on Bottomfish Fishery and Research throughout Hawaii Archipelago

HONOLULU (18 October 2006) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council today in Honolulu approved a suite of measures to address the impacts of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) Marine National Monument proclaimed by President George W. Bush on June 15, 2006. At approximately 140,000 square nautical miles, the monument accounts for nearly four-fifths of the Hawaii Archipelago. It is seven times larger than all existing national monuments combined and the entire national park system. Prior to the proclamation, it accounted for up to one half of the locally landed bottomfish in Hawaii.

The monument regulations ostensibly allow eight federally permitted NWHI fishing vessels to continue operating for five years. However, its ban on anchoring and on commercial fishing in newly established ecological reserves, special management areas and special preservation areas makes fishing impossible.

“Anchoring is an absolutely essential part of the way we fish,” testified NWHI bottomfish fishermen Timm Timoney today. “We might as well tie the boat to the dock if we can’t anchor.”

Bottomfish vessels use anchors to stay positioned over the area where the fish are found. Timoney said that sea anchors are not an option because of the size of the NWHI boats and the severity of NWHI conditions where currents run up to 10 knots. They are also dangerous to deploy in bad weather. Motoring to stay in place is also not an option because these vessels, restricted to 60 feet in length, operate with as little as two people and both are needed to handle the fishing gear. The no anchoring provision is also a safety issue, as it makes sleeping a hardship for crews at night during two- to three-week long trips to this remote region. The provision also has no scientific basis. Timoney said that they have given researchers the coordinates of their bottomfish spots, and research divers found no damage to the habitat and no anchors left behind. Published research findings (*Atoll Research Bulletin* #543, Feb. 2006) support these conclusions.

Dan Polhemus, the Council member representing the State of Hawaii, which is one of the three co-trustees of the monument, agreed. “You simply can’t fish if you can’t anchor.” Bill Robinson, the representative for NOAA, which is the second of the three monument co-trustees, also supported lifting the no-anchoring provision but along with Polhemus abstained from voting. The Council member representing the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the third co-trustee, was absent.

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Nine of the 12 present voting Council members recommended that the no anchoring provision for the bottomfish fishery be eliminated as well as the special preservation area and ecological reserve closures.

The Council noted that there is no rational basis for these closures given current fishing operations, which include a total harvest cap of 350,000 lbs of bottomfish per year and a total prohibition of commercial fishing scheduled for June 15, 2011. The Council also agreed with the recommendations made by its Bottomfish Plan Team and by federal stock assessment scientists that closing these areas compromises the historical data stream from the fishery and renders useless several decades of NWHI bottomfish data.

To address the impacts of the closures on the fishery and research, the Council voted to amend its Bottomfish Fishery Management Plan as follows:

- To allow any NWHI permit holder to fish for bottomfish management unit species in the Mau Zone (around Necker and Nihoa) and Hoomalu Zone (around rest of the NWHI). Most of the closed areas are in the Hoomalu Zone. The small size of some vessels restricts them from reaching the open areas in this zone. Scientific analysis indicates that bottomfish populations in both zones are healthy and there is no problem in permitting NWHI bottomfish fishermen the option to operate in either zone for the next five years.
- To refine the Hoomalu Zone to mean the portion of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) around the NWHI west of 165° W longitude and out to 50 nautical miles (nm) from the center geographical positions of French Frigate Shoals, Gardner Pinnacles, Maro Reef, Laysan Island, Lisianski Island, Pearl and Hermes Reef, Midway Islands, and Kure Island and to refine the Mau Zone to mean the portion of the EEZ around the NWHI between 161° W longitude and 165° W longitude and out to 50 nm from the center geographical positions of Necker and Nihoa. This measure would provide conformity between the zone boundaries and the monument boundaries.
- To suspend use it or lose it provisions for NWHI bottomfish permits.
- To conduct fishery sampling in the monument since this would provide the most reliable indicator of stock status and an indication of the health of the NWHI marine ecosystem or, as a second option, to use model projections as a proxy for stock status in the NWHI.

The Council also made several recommendations for the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) bottomfish fishery, in response to the impacts of the monument as well as to an updated bottomfish stock assessment that indicates that the status of seven deepwater bottomfish species in the MHI continues to decline. The MHI bottomfish recommendations include the following:

- To analyze MHI bottomfish as individual species rather than aggregated as a bottomfish complex as has been done in the past.
- To analyze bottomfish by zones as well as a single archipelagic stock.

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- To conduct a fishery independent survey in the MHI prior to pending State and Federal bottomfish closures. In this assessment, the State should allow for sampling within the existing bottomfish area closures.

The Council today also made several other recommendations regarding Hawaii crustaceans and precious corals as well as bottomfish in other U.S. Pacific Islands, including the following:

- To add the deepwater shrimps *Heterocarpus laevigatus* and *Heterocarpus ensifer* as species to be managed.
- To investigate the scientific basis behind underlying the rationale behind the recent State of Hawaii regulations prohibiting take of female spiny lobster, Kona crab and Samoan crab.
- To evaluate measures in all new state and federal fishery regulations regarding their effectiveness.
- To develop options to reduce the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) for the Auau Channel black coral fishery by 25 percent (from 5,000 to 3,750 kg per year).
- To work with State and Federal agencies to monitor and track MHI black coral harvest and prevent black coral landings from exceeding the revised MSY values for the Auau Channel fishery.
- To work with the State of Hawaii to create a black coral biological reference area in the Auau Channel where harvest would be banned except for collections related to permitted research activities.
- To investigate the creation of a limited access program for the MHI black coral fishery.
- To prepare options to place a moratorium on the harvest of gold coral in the U.S. Pacific Islands accompanied by a multi-prong research program.
- To request that NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center work with respective island agency staffs to finalize the American Samoa, Guam and Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands bottomfish stock assessments by the end of 2006.

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

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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)