



Scientists to Consider Altering Recommended Measures to End Overfishing of Bottomfish in the Main Hawaiian Islands

HONOLULU (17 February 2007) A new stock assessment for Hawaii bottomfish indicates that the stock around the main Hawaiian Islands is in worse shape than previously determined. In 2005, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) reported that the local stock was at risk unless fishing-related mortality was reduced by 15 percent. Based on that information, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council last year found that the most effective and enforceable measure to end the overfishing is a four-month seasonal closure for all fishermen in the main Hawaiian Islands. As the State of Hawaii did not agree to the seasonal closure for State waters (0 to 3 miles offshore), the Council instead recommended that the Secretary of Commerce close bottomfish grounds in federal waters (beyond 3 miles from shore) at Penguin Banks between Molokai and Oahu and at Middle Bank, northwest of Kauai. Rulemaking on that decision was expected to be completed this year. However, NMFS has now determined that the necessary reduction of fishery-related bottomfish mortality to keep the stock healthy is 24 percent instead of 15 percent.

The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) will convene Feb. 20-22, 2007, to discuss the new situation and recommend measures to reduce fishing mortality to the required level. The SSC will meet at the Council office, 1164 Bishop St., Suite 1400, Honolulu. The SSC recommendations will be considered by the Council when it meets March 13-16, 2007, in Honolulu. Fishermen and other members of the public are invited to provide public comment at the SSC and Council meetings as well as during the Fishers Forum to be held March 14 at the Ala Moana Hotel.

In its discussion, the SSC will take into account recent changes that the State of Hawaii has made to the size, number and locations of its bottomfish restricted fishing areas. It will consider a new analysis that indicates that the majority of bottomfish habitat in the main Hawaiian Islands is in federal and not State waters, as previously believed. Additionally, the SSC will take into account changes in the recently reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act that direct Regional Fishery Management Councils to consider quota-based management.

The SSC will also consider and may make recommendations on other offshore fishery issues for the U.S. Pacific islands, including the following:

- Combining the two Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) bottomfish fishing zones and refining their boundaries consistent with the NWHI Marine National Monument boundaries

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- Modifying Hawaii swordfish effort limit
- Modifying the longline area closure for Guam

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council) is the policy-making organization for fisheries management in federal waters (generally 3-200 miles offshore) of the U.S. Pacific Islands. Recommendations approved by the Council are forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for approval. For more information and full agendas of the meetings, visit www.wpcouncil.org or contact the Council at (808) 522-8220 or at info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov.

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE

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