



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

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

HONOLULU (12 March 2007) A new stock assessment for Hawaii bottomfish indicates that the stock around the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) is in worse shape than previously determined and that fishery-related mortality of the species must be reduced by 24 percent to keep the stock healthy. 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.

The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee last month recommended that the Council consider a combination of measures to reduce bottomfish fishing mortality by 24 percent around the main Hawaiian Islands. They would place tighter restrictions on both commercial and recreational bottomfish fishermen:

- Total allowable catch (TAC) for commercial harvests of 178,000 lbs of MHI deepwater bottomfish per year,
- Seasonal closure from harvesting deepwater bottomfish for both commercial and recreational fishermen from May 1 to August 31, the peak summer spawning period for bottomfish.
- Federal permit and reporting requirements for recreational bottomfish fishermen.

These proposed federal regulations would replace the Council's recommendations made last year that would have closed bottomfish grounds in federal waters at Penguin and Middle Banks and would be in addition to current State of Hawaii bottomfish regulations, which already include recreational bag limits and bottomfish restricted fishing areas.

The public is invited to provide public comment when the Council convenes March 13-16, 2007, at the Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu, and at the Fishers Forum at the Ala Moana Hotel, 6-9 p.m., March 14.

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During its meeting, the Council 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
- 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 Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and other 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.

WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Appointed by Secretary of Commerce

- AMERICAN SAMOA: Frank W. McCoy Sr. (Harbor Refuse & Environmental Services) and Stephen Haleck (service station owner)
- GUAM: Manuel Duenas (Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association)
- HAWAII: Edwin Ebisui (attorney at law), Sean Martin (Pacific Ocean Producers), Rick Gaffney (Rick Gaffney & Associates), Frederick Duerr (resort and hotel consultant)
- CNMI: Benigno Sablan (cultural practitioner)

Designated State Officials

- Ray Tulafono (American Samoa Dept. of Marine & Wildlife Resources)
- Dr. Ignacio Dela Cruz (CNMI Dept. of Land & Natural Resources)
- Adrienne Loerzel (Office of the Governor of Guam)
- Peter Young (Hawaii Dept. of Land & Natural Resources)

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- Bill Robinson (Pacific Islands Regional Office)

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